This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

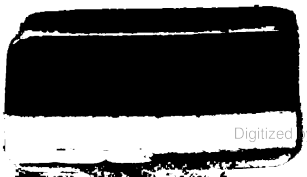
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE

WORKS

OF

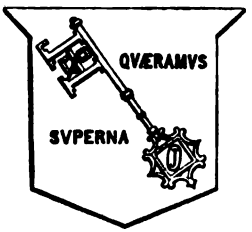
JOHN OWEN, D. D.

EDITED

BY THE REV. WILLIAM H. GOOLD,

EDINBURGH.

VOL. VI.



JOHNSTONE AND HUNTER,

LONDON AND EDINBURGH.

M.DCCC.LI.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ARN6232

463379
DEC 12 1938
CD
.OW2
6

CONTENTS OF VOL. VI.

OF THE MORTIFICATION OF SIN IN BELIEVERS, ETC.

Page

PREFATORY NOTE BY THE EDITOR 2
Preface 3

CHAPTER I.

The foundation of the whole ensuing discourse laid in Rom. viii. 13—The words of the apostle opened—The certain connection between true mortification and salvation—Mortification the work of believers—The Spirit the principal efficient cause of it—What meant by "the body" in the words of the apostle—What by "the deeds of the body"—Life, in what sense promised to this duty . . 5

CHAPTER II.

The principal assertion concerning the necessity of mortification proposed to confirmation—Mortification the duty of the best believers, Col. iii. 5; 1 Cor. ix. 27—Indwelling sin always abides; no perfection in this life, Phil. iii. 12; 1 Cor. xiii. 12; 2 Pet. iii. 18; Gal. v. 17, etc.—The activity of abiding sin in believers, Rom. vii. 23; James iv. 5; Heb. xii. 1—Its fruitfulness and tendency—Every lust aims at the height in its kind—The Spirit and new nature given to contend against indwelling sin, Gal. v. 17; 2 Pet. i. 4, 5; Rom. vii. 23—The fearful issue of the neglect of mortification, Rev. iii. 2; Heb. iii. 13—The first general principle of the whole discourse hence confirmed—Want of this duty lamented . 9

CHAPTER III.

The second general principle of the means of mortification proposed to confirmation—The Spirit the only author of this work—Vanity of popish mortification discovered—Many means of it used by them not appointed of God—Those appointed by him abused—The mistakes of others in this business—The Spirit is promised believers for this work, Ezek. xi. 19, xxxvi. 26—All that we receive from Christ is by the Spirit—How the Spirit mortifies sin—Gal. v. 19–23—The several ways of his operation to this end proposed—How his work and our duty . . 16

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV.

Page

The last principle; of the usefulness of mortification—The vigour and comfort of our spiritual lives depend on our mortification—In what sense—Not absolutely and necessarily; Ps. lxxxviii., Heman's condition—Not as on the next and immediate cause—As a means; by removing of the contrary—The desperate effects of any unmortified lust; it weakens the soul, Ps. xxxviii. 3, 8, sundry ways, and darkens it—All graces improved by the mortification of sin—The best evidence of sincerity 21

CHAPTER V.

The principal intendment of the whole discourse proposed—The first main case of conscience stated—What it is to mortify any sin, negatively considered—Not the utter destruction of it in this life—Not the dissimulation of it—Not the improvement of any natural principle—Not the diversion of it—Not an occasional conquest—Occasional conquests of sin, what and when; upon the eruption of sin; in time of danger or trouble 24

CHAPTER VI.

The mortification of sin in particular described—The several parts and degrees thereof—The habitual weakening of its root and principle—The power of lust to tempt—Differences of that power as to persons and times—Constant fighting against sin—The parts thereof considered—Success against it—The sum of this discourse considered 28

CHAPTER VII.

General rules, without which no lust will be mortified—No mortification unless a man be a believer—Dangers of attempting mortification of sin by unregenerate persons—The duty of unconverted persons as to this business of mortification considered—The vanity of the Papists' attempts and rules for mortification thence discovered 33

CHAPTER VIII.

The second general rule proposed—Without universal sincerity for the mortifying of every lust, no lust will be mortified—Partial mortification always from a corrupt principle—Perplexity of temptation from a lust oftentimes a chastening for other negligences 40

CHAPTER IX.

Particular directions in relation to the foregoing case proposed—First, Consider the dangerous symptoms of any lust—1. Inveterateness—2. Peace obtained under it; the several ways whereby that is done—3. Frequency of success in its seductions—4. The soul's fighting against it with arguments only taken from the event—5. Its being attended with judiciary hardness—6. Its withstanding particular dealings from God—The state of persons in whom these things are found 43

CHAPTER X.

The second particular direction: Get a clear sense of,—1. The guilt of the sin perplexing—Considerations for help therein proposed—2. The danger manifold—(1.) Hardening—(2.) Temporal correction—(3.) Loss of peace and strength—(4.) Eternal destruction—Rules for the management of this consideration—3. The evil of it—(1.) In grieving the Spirit—(2.) Wounding the new creature—[(3.) Taking away a man's usefulness.] 50

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI.

Page

The THIRD direction proposed: Load thy conscience with the guilt of the perplexing distemper—The ways and means whereby that may be done—The FOURTH direction: Vehement desire for deliverance—The FIFTH: Some distempers rooted deeply in men's natural tempers—Considerations of such distempers; ways of dealing with them—The SIXTH direction: Occasions and advantages of sin to be prevented—The SEVENTH direction: The first actings of sin vigorously to be opposed 56

CHAPTER XII.

The EIGHTH direction: Thoughtfulness of the excellency of the majesty of God—Our unacquaintedness with him proposed and considered 63

CHAPTER XIII.

The NINTH direction: When the heart is disquieted by sin, speak no peace to it until God speak it—Peace, without detestation of sin, unsound; so is peace measured out unto ourselves—How we may know when we measure our peace unto ourselves—Directions as to that inquiry—The vanity of speaking peace slightly; also of doing it on one singular account, not universally 70

CHAPTER XIV.

The general use of the foregoing directions—The great direction for the accomplishment of the work aimed at: Act faith on Christ—The several ways whereby this may be done—Consideration of the fulness in Christ for relief proposed—Great expectations from Christ—Grounds of these expectations: his mercifulness, his faithfulness—Event of such expectations; on the part of Christ; on the part of believers—Faith peculiarly to be acted on the death of Christ, Rom. vi. 3–6—The work of the Spirit in this whole business 78

OF TEMPTATION: THE NATURE AND POWER OF IT, ETC.

PREFATORY NOTE BY THE EDITOR 88
To the Reader 89

CHAPTER I.

The words of the text, that are the foundation of the ensuing discourse—The occasion of the words, with their dependence—The things specially aimed at in them—Things considerable in the words as to the general purpose in hand—Of the general nature of temptation, wherein it consists—The special nature of temptation—Temptation taken actively and passively—How God tempts any—His ends in so doing—The way whereby he doth it—Of temptation in its special nature: of the actions of it—The true nature of temptation stated . . 91

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II.

Page

What it is to "enter into temptation"—Not barely being tempted—Not to be conquered by it—To fall into it—The force of that expression—Things required unto entering into temptation—Satan or lust more than ordinarily importunate—The soul's entanglements—Seasons of such entanglements discovered—Of the "hour of temptation," Rev. iii. 10, what it is—How any temptation comes to its hour—How it may be known when it is so come—The means of prevention prescribed by our Saviour—Of watching, and what is intended thereby—Of prayer 96

CHAPTER III.

The doctrine—Grounds of it; our Saviour's direction in this case—His promise of preservation—Issues of men entering into temptation—1. Of ungrounded professors—2. Of the choicest saints, Adam, Abraham, David—Self-consideration as to our own weakness—The power of a man's heart to withstand temptation considered—The considerations that it useth for that purpose—The power of temptation; it darkens the mind—The several ways whereby it doth so—1. By fixing the imaginations—2. By entangling the affections—3. Temptations give fuel to lust—The end of temptation considered, with the issue of former temptations—Some objections answered 101

CHAPTER IV.

Particular cases proposed to consideration—The first, its resolution in sundry particulars—Several discoveries of the state of a soul entering into temptation . 117

CHAPTER V.

The second case proposed, or inquiries resolved—What are the best directions to prevent entering into temptation?—Those directions laid down—The directions given by our Saviour: "Watch and pray"—What is included therein—(1.) Sense of the danger of temptation—(2.) That it is not in our power to keep ourselves—(3.) Faith in promises of preservation—Of prayer in particular . 122

CHAPTER VI.

Of watching that we enter not into temptation—The nature and efficacy of that duty—The first part of it, as to the special seasons of temptation—The first season, in unusual prosperity—The second, in a slumber of grace—Third, a season of great spiritual enjoyment—The fourth, a season of self-confidence . . 127

CHAPTER VII.

Several acts of watchfulness against temptation proposed—Watch the heart—What it is to be watched in and about—Of the snares lying in men's natural tempers—Of peculiar lusts—Of occasions suited to them—Watching to lay in provision against temptation—Directions for watchfulness in the first approaches of temptation—Directions after entering into temptation 131

CHAPTER VIII.

The last general direction, Rev. iii. 10, Watch against temptation by constant "keeping the word of Christ's patience"—What that word is—How it is kept—How the keeping of it will keep us from the "hour of temptation." . . 137

CHAPTER IX.

General exhortation to the duty prescribed 149

Digitized by Google

THE NATURE, POWER, DECEIT, AND PREVALENCY OF THE REMAINDERS OF INDWELLING SIN IN BELIEVERS.

Page
PREFATORY NOTE BY THE EDITOR 154
Preface 155

CHAPTER I.

Indwelling sin in believers treated of by the apostle, Rom. vii. 21—The place explained 157

CHAPTER II.

Indwelling sin a law—In what sense it is so called—What kind of law it is—An inward effective principle called a law—The power of sin thence evinced . . 163

CHAPTER III.

The seat or subject of the law of sin, the heart—What meant thereby—Properties of the heart as possessed by sin, unsearchable, deceitful—Whence that deceit ariseth—Improvement of these considerations 169

CHAPTER IV.

Indwelling sin enmity against God—Thence its power—Admits of no peace nor rest—Is against God himself—Acts itself in aversation from God, and propensity to evil—Is universal—To all of God—In all of the soul—Constant . . . 176

CHAPTER V.

Nature of sin farther discovered as it is enmity against God—Its aversation from all good opened—Means to prevent the effects of it prescribed . . . 182

CHAPTER VI.

The work of this enmity against God by way of opposition—First, It lusteth—Wherein the lusting of sin consisteth—Its surprising of the soul—Readiness to close with temptations—Secondly, Its fighting and warring—1. In rebellion against the law of grace—2. In assaulting the soul 188

CHAPTER VII.

The captivating power of indwelling sin, wherein it consisteth—The prevalency of sin, when from itself, when from temptation—The rage and madness that is in sin 202

CHAPTER VIII.

Indwelling sin proved powerful from its deceit—Proved to be deceitful—The general nature of deceit—James i. 14, opened—How the mind is drawn off from its duty by the deceitfulness of sin—The principal duties of the mind in our obedience—The ways and means whereby it is turned from it 211

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX.

Page
The deceit of sin, in drawing off the mind from a due attendance unto especial duties of obedience, instanced in meditation and prayer 224

CHAPTER X.

The deceit of sin, in drawing off the mind from its attendance unto particular duties farther discovered—Several things required in the mind of believers with respect unto particular duties of obedience—The actings of sin, in a way of deceit, to divert the mind from them 232

CHAPTER XI.

The working of sin by deceit to entangle the affections—The ways whereby it is done—Means of their prevention 245

CHAPTER XII.

The conception of sin through its deceit—Wherein it consisteth—The consent of the will unto sin—The nature thereof—Ways and means whereby it is obtained—Other advantages made use of by the deceit of sin—Ignorance—Error . . 251

CHAPTER XIII.

Several ways whereby the bringing forth of conceived sin is obstructed . . 260

CHAPTER XIV.

The power of sin farther demonstrated by the effects it hath had in the lives of professors—First, in actual sins—Secondly, in habitual declensions . . . 278

CHAPTER XV.

Decays in degrees of grace caused by indwelling sin—The ways of its prevalency to this purpose 290

CHAPTER XVI.

The strength of indwelling sin manifested from its power and effects in persons unregenerate 303

CHAPTER XVII.

The strength of sin evidenced from its resistance unto the power of the law . . 313

A PRACTICAL EXPOSITION UPON PSALM CXXX.

Prefatory Note by the Editor 324
To the Reader 325
Psalm cxxx. 327
A paraphrase 327
General scope of the whole psalm 329

Digitized by Google

VERSES FIRST AND SECOND.

Page

The state and condition of the soul represented in the psalm—The two first verses opened 330
Gracious souls may be brought into depths on the account of sin—What those depths are 332
Whence it is that believers may be brought into depths on account of sin—Nature of the supplies of grace given in the covenant—How far they extend—Principles of the power of sin 338
What sins usually bring believers into great spiritual distresses—Aggravations of these sins 344
The duty and actings of a believer under distresses from a sense of sin—His application unto God, to God alone—Earnestness and intension of mind therein . 349

VERSE THIRD.

The words of the verse explained, and their meaning opened 359
What first presents itself to a soul in distress on the account of sin—This opened in four propositions—Thoughts of God's marking sin according to the tenor of the law full of dread and terror 361
The first particular actings of a soul towards a recovery out of the depths of sin—Sense of sin, wherein it consists, how it is wrought—Acknowledgment of sin; its nature and properties—Self-condemnation 368
Grounds of miscarriages when persons are convinced of sin and humbled—Resting in that state—Resting on it 376

VERSE FOURTH.

The words explained, and the design or scope of the psalmist in them discovered . 379
Propositions or observations from the former exposition of the words—The first proposed to confirmation—No encouragement for any sinner to approach unto God without a discovery of forgiveness 383
Greatness and rareness of the discovery of forgiveness in God—Reasons of it—Testimonies of conscience and law against it, etc. 386
False presumptions of forgiveness discovered—Differences between them and faith evangelical 393
The true nature of gospel forgiveness—Its relation to the goodness, grace, and will of God; to the blood of Christ; to the promise of the gospel—The considerations of faith about it 398
Forgiveness discovered or revealed only to faith—Reasons thereof 410
Discovery of forgiveness in God a great supportment to sin-entangled souls—Particular assurance attainable 412
Evidences of forgiveness in God—No inbred notions of any free acts of God's will—Forgiveness not revealed by the works of nature nor the law 427
Discovery of forgiveness in the first promise—The evidence of the truth that lies therein—And by the institution of sacrifices—Their use and end—Also by the prescription of repentance unto sinners 433
Farther evidences of forgiveness with God—Testimonies that God was well pleased with some that were sinners—The patience of God towards the world an evidence of forgiveness—Experience of the saints of God to the same purpose . 443
Institution of religious worship an evidence of forgiveness 461
The giving and establishing of the new covenant another evidence of forgiveness with God—The oath of God engaged in the confirmation thereof 470
The name of God confirming the truth and reality of forgiveness with him—As also the same is done by the properties of his nature 478
Forgiveness manifested in the sending of the Son of God to die for sin—And from the obligation that is on us to forgive one another 487
Properties of forgiveness—The greatness and freedom of it 498
Evidences that most men do not believe forgiveness 505

Digitized by Google

Page
Exhortation unto the belief of the forgiveness that is with God—Reasons for it, and the necessity of it 515
Rules to be observed by them who would come to stability in obedience . . 541
Rule I.—Christ the only infallible judge of our spiritual condition—How he judgeth by his word and Spirit 542
Rule II.—Self-condemnation and abhorrency for sin consistent with gospel justification and peace—The nature of gospel assurance—What is consistent with it—What are the effects of it 547
Rule III.—Continuance in waiting necessary unto peace and consolation . . 553
Rule IV.—Remove the hinderances of believing by a searching out of sin—Rules and directions for that duty 555
Rule V.—Distinction between unbelief and jealousy 558
Rule VI.—Distinction between faith and spiritual sense 561
Rule VII.—Mix not foundation and building work together 564
Rule VIII.—Spend not time in heartless complaints 566
Rule IX.—Take heed of undue expressions concerning God and his ways in distress 570
Rule X.—Duly improve the least appearances of God in a way of grace or pardon . 573
Rule XI.—[Consider where lies the hinderance to peace] 574
Second general head of the application of the truth insisted on—Grounds of spiritual disquietments considered—The first, afflictions—Ways and means of the aggravation of afflictions—Rules about them 575
Objections against believing from things internal—The person knows not whether he be regenerate or no—State of regeneration asserted—Difference of saving and common grace—This difference discernible—Men may know themselves to be regenerate—The objection answered 584
Rule I. 593
Rule II. 594
Rule III. 594
Rule IV. 595
Objections from the present state and condition of the soul—Weakness and imperfection of duty—Opposition from indwelling sin 600

VERSES FIFTH AND SIXTH.

[The words explained] 606
God the proper object of the soul's waiting in its distresses and depths . . 618
Considerations of God rendering our waiting on him reasonable and necessary—His glorious being 620
Influence of the promises into the soul's waiting in time of trouble—The nature of them 637

VERSES SEVENTH AND EIGHTH.

[The words explained] 641
[Doctrinal observations on them] 647

Digitized by Google

OF THE

MORTIFICATION OF SIN IN BELIEVERS;

THE NECESSITY, NATURE, AND MEANS OF IT:

WITH

A RESOLUTION OF SUNDRY CASES OF CONSCIENCE THEREUNTO BELONGING.

BY JOHN OWEN, D.D.,

A SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE WORK OF THE GOSPEL.

Digitized by Google

PREFATORY NOTE.

It sheds interesting light on the character and resources of Owen, if the circumstances in which the following treatise was composed are borne in mind. It was published in 1656, and its author was at the time Dean of Christ Church and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, restoring it, by a course of mingled kindliness and decision, from the ruinous condition into which it had lapsed during the civil wars, and raising it to such prosperity as to extort the praises of Clarendon. He was preaching, each alternate Sabbath, those sermons which lingered in the memory and strengthened the piety of Philip Henry. He was frequently summoned to London on momentous consultations respecting public affairs, and to preach before the Parliament. As if this amount of toil were not sufficient to occupy him,—toil so great that, in his noble address on resigning the vice-chancellorship of the University, he describes himself as having been "sæpius morti proximus"—the Council of State had imposed on him the task of replying to Biddle the Socinian; and he fulfilled it by the production of his elaborate and masterly work, "Vindiciæ Evangelicæ,"—a bulwark of the faith, so solid in its foundation, and so massy in its proportions, that the entire phalanx of Socinian authorship has shrunk from the attempt to assail it. In the next year, and but a few months after this great work had appeared, as if his secular labours in the management of the University, his own heavy share in the burden of public affairs, and the rough duties of controversy, could not arrest the progress of grace in his own soul, or deaden his zeal for the promotion of vital godliness around him, he gave to the world this treatise, "On the Mortification of Sin in Believers."

We learn from the preface, that it embodies what he had preached with such acceptance that "sundry persons, in whose hearts are the ways of God," pressed him to publish it. He had a desire also to correct certain "dangerous mistakes" into which some preachers or writers of that day had fallen, who recommended and enforced a process of mortifying sin which was not conducted on evangelical principles, and only tended to ensnare the conscience, and foster self-righteousness and superstition. The directions which our author gives in order to subdue the power of internal corruption are at the farthest remove from all the arts and practices of a hollow asceticism. There is no trace in this work of the morbid and dreamy tone of kindred treatises, which have emerged from a life of cloistered seclusion. Our author's knowledge of human nature, in its real elements, and as it appears in the wide arena of life, is only surpassed by his acquaintance with the truths of the Word, and their bearing on the experience and workings of every heart. The reader is made to feel, above all things, that the only cross on which he can nail his every lust to its utter destruction, is, not the devices of a self-inflicted maceration, but the tree on which Christ hung, made a curse for us.

After an analysis and explanation of the passage in Scripture (Rom. viii. 13) on which the treatise is based, some general principles are deduced and expounded. What follows is designed—first, to show wherein the real mortification of sin consists; secondly, to assign general directions, without which no sin can be spiritually mortified; and, lastly, to unfold at length and in detail specific and particular directions for this important spiritual exercise.

The treatise has been so much a favourite, that it passed through several editions in the author's lifetime. It is given here as corrected and enlarged in the second edition (1658), though by some oversight modern reprints of it have been always taken from the first. The estimate of its value indicated by the number of the early editions, is confirmed by the circumstance, that it has since obtained the especial recommendation of Mr Wilberforce. (See his "Practical View," etc. p. 392.)—Ed.

Digitized by Google

PREFACE.

CHRISTIAN READER,

I SHALL in a few words acquaint thee with the reasons that obtained my consent to the publishing of the ensuing discourse. The consideration of the present state and condition of the generality of professors, the visible evidences of the frame of their hearts and spirits, manifesting a great disability of dealing with the temptations wherewith, from the peace they have in the world and the divisions that they have among themselves, they are encompassed, holds the chief place amongst them. This I am assured is of so great importance, that if hereby I only occasion others to press more effectually on the consciences of men the work of considering their ways, and to give more clear direction for the compassing of the end proposed, I shall well esteem of my lot in this undertaking. This was seconded by an observation of some men's dangerous mistakes, who of late days have taken upon them to give directions for the mortification of sin, who, being unacquainted with the mystery of the gospel and the efficacy of the death of Christ, have anew imposed the yoke of a self-wrought-out mortification on the necks of their disciples, which neither they nor their forefathers were ever able to bear. A mortification they cry up and press, suitable to that of the gospel neither in respect of nature, subject, causes, means, nor effects; which constantly produces the deplorable issues of superstition, self-righteousness, and anxiety of conscience in them who take up the burden which is so bound for them.

What is here proposed in weakness, I humbly hope will answer the spirit and letter of the gospel, with the experiences of them who know what it is to walk with God, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace. So that if not this, yet certainly something of this kind, is very necessary at this season for the promotion and furtherance of this work of gospel mortification in the hearts of believers, and their direction in paths safe, and wherein they may find rest to their souls. Something I have to add as to what in particular relates unto myself. Having preached on this subject unto some comfortable success, through the grace of Him that administereth seed to the sower, I was pressed by sundry persons, in whose hearts are the ways of God, thus to publish what I had delivered, with such additions and alterations as I should judge necessary. Under the inducement of their desires, I called to remembrance the debt, wherein I have now for some years stood engaged unto sundry noble and worthy Christian friends, as to a treatise of Communion with God, some while since promised to them;[1] and thereon apprehended, that if I could not hereby compound for the greater debt, yet I might possibly tender them this discourse of *variance with themselves*, as interest for their forbearance of that of *peace and communion with God*. Besides, I considered that I had been providentially engaged in the public debate of sundry controversies in religion, which might seem to claim something in another kind of more general

[1] Since the first edition of this treatise, that other also is published.

Digitized by Google

use, as a fruit of choice, not necessity. On these and the like accounts is this short discourse brought forth to public view, and now presented unto thee. I hope I may own in sincerity, that my heart's desire unto God, and the chief design of my life in the station wherein the good providence of God hath placed me, are, that mortification and universal holiness may be promoted in my own and in the hearts and ways of others, to the glory of God; that so the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may be adorned in all things: for the compassing of which end, if this little discourse (of the publishing whereof this is the sum of the account I shall give) may in any thing be useful to the least of the saints, it will be looked on as a return of the weak prayers wherewith it is attended by its unworthy author,

JOHN OWEN.

Digitized by Google

OF THE

MORTIFICATION OF SIN IN BELIEVERS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

The foundation of the whole ensuing discourse laid in Rom. viii. 13—The words of the apostle opened—The certain connection between true mortification and salvation—Mortification the work of believers—The Spirit the principal efficient cause of it—What meant by "the body" in the words of the apostle—What by "the deeds of the body"—Life, in what sense promised to this duty.

THAT what I have of direction to contribute to the carrying on of the work of mortification in believers may receive order and perspicuity, I shall lay the foundation of it in those words of the apostle, Rom. viii. 13, "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body ye shall live;" and reduce the whole to an improvement of the great evangelical truth and mystery contained in them.

The apostle having made a recapitulation of his doctrine of justification by faith, and the blessed estate and condition of them who are made by grace partakers thereof, verses 1–3 of this chapter, proceeds to improve it to the holiness and consolation of believers.

Among his arguments and motives unto holiness, the verse mentioned containeth one from the contrary events and effects of holiness and sin: "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die." What it is to "live after the flesh," and what it is to "die," that being not my present aim and business, I shall no otherwise explain than as they will fall in with the sense of the latter words of the verse, as before proposed.

In the words peculiarly designed for the foundation of the ensuing discourse, there is,—

First, A *duty* prescribed: "Mortify the deeds of the body."

Secondly, The persons are denoted to *whom* it is prescribed: "Ye,"—"if ye mortify."

Thirdly, There is in them a *promise* annexed to that duty: "Ye shall live."

Digitized by Google

Fourthly, The *cause* or means of the performance of this duty,—the Spirit: "If ye through the Spirit."

Fifthly, The *conditionality* of the whole proposition, wherein duty, means, and promise are contained: "If ye," etc.

1. The first thing occurring in the words as they lie in the entire proposition is the conditional note, Εἰ δὲ, "But if." Conditionals in such propositions may denote two things:—

(1.) The *uncertainty* of the *event* or thing promised, in respect of them to whom the duty is prescribed. And this takes place where the condition is absolutely necessary unto the issue, and depends not itself on any determinate cause known to him to whom it is prescribed. So we say, "If we live, we will do such a thing." This cannot be the intendment of the conditional expression in this place. Of the persons to whom these words are spoken, it is said, verse 1 of the same chapter, "There is no condemnation to them."

(2.) The *certainty* of the *coherence* and connection that is between the things spoken of; as we say to a sick man, "If you will take such a potion, or use such a remedy, you will be well." The thing we solely intend to express is the certainty of the connection that is between the potion or remedy and health. And this is the use of it here. The certain connection that is between the *mortifying* of the deeds of the body and *living* is intimated in this conditional particle.

Now, the connection and coherence of things being manifold, as of cause and effect, of way and means and the end, this between mortification and life is not of cause and effect properly and strictly,—for "eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ," Rom. vi. 23,—but of means and end. God hath appointed this means for the attaining that end, which he hath freely promised. Means, though necessary, have a fair subordination to an end of free promise. A gift, and procuring cause in him to whom it is given, are inconsistent. The intendment, then, of this proposition as conditional is, that there is a certain infallible connection and coherence between true mortification and eternal life: if you use this means, you shall obtain that end; if you do mortify, you shall live. And herein lies the main motive unto and enforcement of the duty prescribed.

2. The next thing we meet withal in the words is the *persons* to whom this duty is prescribed, and that is expressed in the word "Ye," in the original included in the verb, θανατοῦτε, "if ye mortify;"—that is, ye believers; ye to whom "there is no condemnation," verse 1; ye that are "not in the flesh, but in the Spirit," verse 9; who are "quickened by the Spirit of Christ," verses 10, 11; to you is this duty prescribed. The pressing of this duty immediately on any other is a notable fruit of that superstition and self-righteousness that the world

Digitized by Google

is full of,—the great work and design of devout men ignorant of the gospel, Rom. x. 3, 4; John xv. 5. Now, this description of the persons, in conjunction with the prescription of the duty, is the main foundation of the ensuing discourse, as it lies in this thesis or proposition:—

The choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin.

3. The principal *efficient cause* of the performance of this duty is the Spirit: Εἰ δὲ Πνεύματι,—"If by the Spirit." The Spirit here is the Spirit mentioned verse 11, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God, that "dwells in us," verse 9, that "quickens us," verse 11; "the Holy Ghost," verse 14;[1] the "Spirit of adoption," verse 15; the Spirit "that maketh intercession for us," verse 26. All other ways of mortification are vain, all helps leave us helpless; it must be done by the Spirit. Men, as the apostle intimates, Rom. ix. 30–32, may attempt this work on other principles, by means and advantages administered on other accounts, as they always have done, and do: but, saith he, "This is the work of the Spirit; by him alone is it to be wrought, and by no other power is it to be brought about." Mortification from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention, unto the end of a self-righteousness, is the soul and substance of all false religion in the world. And this is a second principle of my ensuing discourse.

4. The *duty* itself, "Mortify the deeds of the body," is nextly to be remarked.

Three things are here to be inquired into:—(1.) What is meant by *the body;* (2.) What by *the deeds of the body;* (3.) What by *mortifying* of them.

(1.) *The body* in the close of the verse is the same with *the flesh* in the beginning: "If ye live after the flesh ye shall die; but if ye .... mortify the deeds of the body,"—that is, of the flesh. It is that which the apostle hath all along discoursed of under the name of *the flesh;* which is evident from the prosecution of the antithesis between the Spirit and the flesh, before and after. *The body,* then, here is taken for that corruption and depravity of our natures whereof the body, in a great part, is the seat and instrument, the very members of the body being made servants unto unrighteousness thereby, Rom. vi. 19. It is indwelling sin, the corrupted flesh or lust, that is intended. Many reasons might be given of this metonymical expression, that I shall not now insist on. The "body" here is the same with παλαιὸς ἄνθρωπος, and σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας, the "old man," and the "body of sin," Rom. vi. 6; or it may synecdochically express the

[1] There seems to be an oversight here, as the expression "Holy Ghost" does not occur in the verse cited.—Ed.

Digitized by Google

whole person considered as corrupted, and the seat of lusts and distempered affections.

(2.) The *deeds of the body.* The word is πράξεις, which, indeed, denoteth the outward actions chiefly, "the works of the flesh," as they are called, τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκός, Gal. v. 19; which are there said to be "manifest," and are enumerated. Now, though the outward deeds are here only expressed, yet the inward and next causes are chiefly intended; the "axe is to be laid to the root of the tree,"—the deeds of the flesh are to be mortified in their causes, from whence they spring. The apostle calls them *deeds,* as that which every lust tends unto; though it do but conceive and prove abortive, it aims to bring forth a perfect sin.

Having, both in the seventh and the beginning of this chapter, treated of indwelling lust and sin as the fountain and principle of all sinful actions, he here mentions its destruction under the name of the effects which it doth produce. Πράξεις τοῦ σώματος are, as much as φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός, Rom. viii. 6, the "wisdom of the flesh," by a metonymy of the same nature with the former; or as the παθήματα and ἐπιθυμίαι, the "passions and lusts of the flesh," Gal. v. 24, whence the deeds and fruits of it do arise; and in this sense is *the body* used, Rom. viii. 10: "The body is dead because of sin."

(3.) To *mortify.* Εἰ θανατοῦτε,—"If ye put to death;" a metaphorical expression, taken from the putting of any living thing to death. To kill a man, or any other living thing, is to take away the principle of all his strength, vigour, and power, so that he cannot act or exert, or put forth any proper actings of his own; so it is in this case. Indwelling sin is compared to a person, a living person, called "the old man," with his faculties, and properties, his wisdom, craft, subtlety, strength; this, says the apostle, must be killed, put to death, mortified,—that is, have its power, life, vigour, and strength, to produce its effects, taken away by the Spirit. It is, indeed, meritoriously, and by way of example, utterly mortified and slain by the cross of Christ; and the "old man" is thence said to be "crucified with Christ," Rom. vi. 6, and ourselves to be "dead" with him, verse 8, and really initially in regeneration, Rom. vi. 3–5, when a principle contrary to it, and destructive of it, Gal. v. 17, is planted in our hearts; but the whole work is by degrees to be carried on towards perfection all our days. Of this more in the process of our discourse. The intendment of the apostle in this prescription of the duty mentioned is,—that *the mortification of indwelling sin remaining in our mortal bodies, that it may not have life and power to bring forth the works or deeds of the flesh is the constant duty of believers.*

5. The *promise* unto this duty is life: "Ye shall live." The life promised is opposed to the death threatened in the clause foregoing,

Digitized by Google

"If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die;" which the same apostle expresseth, "Ye shall of the flesh reap corruption," Gal. vi. 8, or destruction from God. Now, perhaps the word may not only intend eternal life, but also the spiritual life in Christ, which here we have; not as to the essence and being of it, which is already enjoyed by believers, but as to the joy, comfort, and vigour of it: as the apostle says in another case, "Now I live, if ye stand fast," 1 Thess. iii. 8; —"Now my life will do me good; I shall have joy and comfort with my life;"—"Ye shall live, lead a good, vigorous, comfortable, spiritual life whilst you are here, and obtain eternal life hereafter."

Supposing what was said before of the connection between mortification and eternal life, as of means and end, I shall add only, as a second motive to the duty prescribed, that,—

The vigour, and power, and comfort of our spiritual life depends on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh.

CHAPTER II.

The principal assertion concerning the necessity of mortification proposed to confirmation—Mortification the duty of the best believers, Col. iii. 5; 1 Cor. ix. 27—Indwelling sin always abides; no perfection in this life, Phil. iii. 12; 1 Cor. xiii. 12; 2 Pet. iii. 18; Gal. v. 17, etc.—The activity of abiding sin in believers, Rom. vii. 23; James iv. 5; Heb. xii. 1—Its fruitfulness and tendency—Every lust aims at the height in its kind—The Spirit and new nature given to contend against indwelling sin, Gal. v. 17; 2 Pet. i. 4, 5; Rom. vii. 23—The fearful issue of the neglect of mortification, Rev. iii. 2; Heb. iii. 13—The first general principle of the whole discourse hence confirmed—Want of this duty lamented.

HAVING laid this foundation, a brief confirmation of the fore-mentioned principal deductions will lead me to what I chiefly intend,—

I. *That the choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin.*

So the apostle, Col. iii. 5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth." Whom speaks he to? Such as were "risen with Christ," verse 1; such as were "dead" with him, verse 3; such as whose life Christ was, and who should "appear with him in glory," verse 4. Do you mortify; do you make it your daily work; be always at it whilst you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you. Your being dead with Christ virtually, your being quickened with him, will not excuse you from this work. And our Saviour tells us how his Father deals with every branch in

Digitized by Google

him that beareth fruit, every true and living branch. "He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit," John xv. 2. He prunes it, and that not for a day or two, but whilst it is a branch in this world. And the apostle tells you what was his practice, 1 Cor. ix. 27, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." "I do it," saith he, "daily; it is the work of my life: I omit it not; this is my business." And if this were the work and business of Paul, who was so incomparably exalted in grace, revelations, enjoyments, privileges, consolations, above the ordinary measure of believers, where may we possibly bottom an exemption from this work and duty whilst we are in this world? Some brief account of the reasons hereof may be given:—

1. Indwelling sin always *abides* whilst we are in this world; therefore it is always to be mortified. The vain, foolish, and ignorant disputes of men about perfect keeping the commands of God, of perfection in this life, of being wholly and perfectly dead to sin, I meddle not now with. It is more than probable that the men of those abominations never knew what belonged to the keeping of any one of God's commands, and are so much below perfection of degrees, that they never attained to a perfection of parts in obedience or universal obedience in sincerity. And, therefore, many in our days who have talked of perfection have been wiser, and have affirmed it to consist in knowing no difference between good and evil. Not that they are perfect in the things we call good, but that all is alike to them, and the height of wickedness is their perfection. Others who have found out a new way to it, by denying original, indwelling sin, and attempering the spirituality of the law of God unto men's carnal hearts, as they have sufficiently discovered themselves to be ignorant of the life of Christ and the power of it in believers, so they have invented a new righteousness that the gospel knows not of, being vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds. For us, who dare not be wise above what is written, nor boast by other men's lines of what God hath not done for us, we say that indwelling sin lives in us, in some measure and degree, whilst we are in this world. We dare not speak as "though we had already attained, or were already perfect," Phil. iii. 12. Our "inward man is to be renewed day by day" whilst here we live, 2 Cor. iv. 16; and according to the renovations of the new are the breaches and decays of the old. Whilst we are here we "know but in part," 1 Cor. xiii. 12, having a remaining darkness to be gradually removed by our "growth in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," 2 Pet. iii. 18; and "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, so that we cannot do the things that we would," Gal. v. 17: and are therefore defective in our obedience as well as in our light, 1 John i. 8. We have a "body of death," Rom. vii. 24;

Digitized by Google

from whence we are not delivered but by the death of our bodies, Phil. iii. 21. Now, it being our duty to mortify, to be killing of sin whilst it is in us, we must be at work. He that is appointed to kill an enemy, if he leave striking before the other ceases living, doth but half his work, Gal. vi. 9; Heb. xii. 1; 2 Cor. vii. 1.

2. Sin doth not only still abide in us, but is still *acting*, still labouring to bring forth the deeds of the flesh. When sin lets us alone we may let sin alone; but as sin is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, and its waters are for the most part deep when they are still, so ought our contrivances against it to be vigorous at all times and in all conditions, even where there is least suspicion. Sin doth not only abide in us, but "the law of the members is still rebelling against the law of the mind," Rom. vii. 23; and "the spirit that dwells in us lusteth to envy," James iv. 5. It is always in continual work; "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit," Gal. v. 17; lust is still tempting and conceiving sin, James i. 14; in every moral action it is always either inclining to evil, or hindering from that which is good, or disframing the spirit from communion with God. It inclines to evil. "The evil which I would not, that I do," saith the apostle, Rom. vii. 19. Whence is that? Why, "Because in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing." And it hinders from good: "The good that I would do, that I do not," verse 19;—"Upon the same account, either I do it not, or not as I should; all my holy things being defiled by this sin." "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would," Gal. v. 17. And it unframes our spirit, and thence is called "The sin that so easily besets us," Heb. xii. 1; on which account are those grievous complaints that the apostle makes of it, Rom. vii. So that sin is always acting, always conceiving, always seducing and tempting. Who can say that he had ever any thing to do with God or for God, that indwelling sin had not a hand in the corrupting of what he did? And this trade will it drive more or less all our days. If, then, sin will be always acting, if we be not always mortifying, we are lost creatures. He that stands still and suffers his enemies to double blows upon him without resistance, will undoubtedly be conquered in the issue. If sin be subtle, watchful, strong, and always at work in the business of killing our souls, and we be slothful, negligent, foolish, in proceeding to the ruin thereof, can we expect a comfortable event? There is not a day but sin foils or is foiled, prevails or is prevailed on; and it will be so whilst we live in this world.

I shall discharge him from this duty who can bring sin to a composition, to a cessation of arms in this warfare; if it will spare him any one day, in any one duty (provided he be a person that is acquainted with the spirituality of obedience and the subtlety of sin),

Digitized by Google

let him say to his soul, as to this duty, "Soul, take thy rest." The saints, whose souls breathe after deliverance from its perplexing rebellion, know there is no safety against it but in a constant warfare.

3. Sin will not only be striving, acting, rebelling, troubling, disquieting, but if let alone, if not continually mortified, it will *bring forth great, cursed, scandalous, soul-destroying sins.* The apostle tells us what the works and fruits of it are, Gal. v. 19–21, "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like." You know what it did in David and sundry others. Sin aims always at the utmost; every time it rises up to tempt or entice, might it have its own course, it would go out to the utmost sin in that kind. Every unclean thought or glance would be adultery if it could; every covetous desire would be oppression, every thought of unbelief would be atheism, might it grow to its head. Men may come to that, that sin may not be heard speaking a scandalous word in their hearts,—that is, provoking to any great sin with scandal in its mouth; but yet every rise of lust, might it have its course, would come to the height of villany: it is like the grave, that is never satisfied. And herein lies no small share of the deceitfulness of sin, by which it prevails to the hardening of men, and so to their ruin, Heb. iii. 13,—it is modest, as it were, in its first motions and proposals, but having once got footing in the heart by them, it constantly makes good its ground, and presseth on to some farther degrees in the same kind. This new acting and pressing forward makes the soul take little notice of what an entrance to a falling off from God is already made; it thinks all is indifferent well if there be no farther progress; and so far as the soul is made insensible of any sin,—that is, as to such a sense as the gospel requireth,—so far it is hardened: but sin is still pressing forward, and that because it hath no bounds but utter relinquishment of God and opposition to him; that it proceeds towards its height by degrees, making good the ground it hath got by hardness, is not from its nature, but its deceitfulness. Now nothing can prevent this but mortification; that withers the root and strikes at the head of sin every hour, so that whatever it aims at it is crossed in. There is not the best saint in the world but, if he should give over this duty, would fall into as many cursed sins as ever any did of his kind.

4. This is one main reason why the Spirit and the new nature is given unto us,—that we may have a principle within whereby to oppose sin and lust. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit." Well! and what then? Why, "The Spirit also lusteth against the flesh," Gal. v. 17. There is a propensity in the Spirit, or spiritual new nature, to

Digitized by Google

be acting against the flesh, as well as in the flesh to be acting against the Spirit: so 2 Pet. i. 4, 5. It is our participation of the divine nature that gives us an escape from the pollutions that are in the world through lust; and, Rom. vii. 23, there is a law of the mind, as well as a law of the members. Now this is, first, the most unjust and unreasonable thing in the world, when two combatants are engaged, to bind one and keep him up from doing his utmost, and to leave the other at liberty to wound him at his pleasure; and, secondly, the foolishest thing in the world to bind him who fights for our eternal condition, [salvation?] and to let him alone who seeks and violently attempts our everlasting ruin. The contest is for our lives and souls. Not to be daily employing the Spirit and new nature for the mortifying of sin, is to neglect that excellent succour which God hath given us against our greatest enemy. If we neglect to make use of what we have received, God may justly hold his hand from giving us more. His graces, as well as his gifts, are bestowed on us to use, exercise, and trade with. Not to be daily mortifying sin, is to sin against the goodness, kindness, wisdom, grace, and love of God, who hath furnished us with a principle of doing it.

5. Negligence in this duty casts the soul into a perfect contrary condition to that which the apostle affirms was his, 2 Cor. iv. 16, "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." In these the inward man perisheth, and the outward man is renewed day by day. Sin is as the house of David, and grace as the house of Saul. *Exercise* and *success* are the two main cherishers of grace in the heart; when it is suffered to lie still, it withers and decays: the things of it are ready to die, Rev. iii. 2; and sin gets ground towards the hardening of the heart, Heb. iii. 13. This is that which I intend: by the omission of this duty grace withers, lust flourisheth, and the frame of the heart grows worse and worse; and the Lord knows what desperate and fearful issues it hath had with many. Where sin, through the neglect of mortification, gets a considerable victory, it breaks the bones of the soul, Ps. xxxi. 10, li. 8, and makes a man weak, sick, and ready to die, Ps. xxxviii. 3–5, so that he cannot look up, Ps. xl. 12, Isa. xxxiii. 24; and when poor creatures will take blow after blow, wound after wound, foil after foil, and never rouse up themselves to a vigorous opposition, can they expect any thing but to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, and that their souls should bleed to death? 2 John 8. Indeed, it is a sad thing to consider the fearful issues of this neglect, which lie under our eyes every day. See we not those, whom we knew humble, melting, broken-hearted Christians, tender and fearful to offend, zealous for God and all his ways, his Sabbaths and ordinances, grown, through a neglect of watching unto this duty, earthly, carnal, cold, wrathful,

Digitized by Google

complying with the men of the world and things of the world, to the scandal of religion and the fearful temptation of them that know them? The truth is, what between placing mortification in a rigid, stubborn frame of spirit, which is for the most part earthly, legal, censorious, partial, consistent with wrath, envy, malice, pride, on the one hand, and pretences of liberty, grace, and I know not what, on the other, true evangelical mortification is almost lost amongst us: of which afterward.

6. It is our duty to be "perfecting holiness in the fear of God," 2 Cor. vii. 1; to be "growing in grace" every day, 1 Pet. ii. 2, 2 Pet. iii. 18; to be "renewing our inward man day by day," 2 Cor. iv. 16. Now, this cannot be done without the daily mortifying of sin. Sin sets its strength against every act of holiness, and against every degree we grow to. Let not that man think he makes any progress in holiness who walks not over the bellies of his lusts. He who doth not kill sin in his way takes no steps towards his journey's end. He who finds not opposition from it, and who sets not himself in every particular to its mortification, is at peace with it, not dying to it.

This, then, is the first general principle of our ensuing discourse: Notwithstanding the meritorious mortification, if I may so speak, of all and every sin in the cross of Christ; notwithstanding the real foundation of universal mortification laid in our first conversion, by conviction of sin, humiliation for sin, and the implantation of a new principle opposite to it and destructive of it;—yet sin doth so remain, so act and work in the best of believers, whilst they live in this world, that the constant daily mortification of it is all their days incumbent on them. Before I proceed to the consideration of the next principle, I cannot but by the way complain of many professors of these days, who, instead of bringing forth such great and evident fruits of mortification as are expected, scarce bear any leaves of it. There is, indeed, a broad light fallen upon the men of this generation, and together therewith many spiritual gifts communicated, which, with some other considerations, have wonderfully enlarged the bounds of professors and profession; both they and it are exceedingly multiplied and increased. Hence there is a noise of religion and religious duties in every corner, preaching in abundance,—and that not in an empty, light, trivial, and vain manner, as formerly, but to a good proportion of a spiritual gift,—so that if you will measure the number of believers by light, gifts, and profession, the church may have cause to say, "Who hath born me all these?" But now if you will take the measure of them by this great discriminating grace of Christians, perhaps you will find their number not so multiplied. Where almost is that professor who owes his conversion to these days of light, and so talks and professes at such a rate of spirituality as

Digitized by Google

few in former days were, in any measure, acquainted with (I will not judge them, but perhaps boasting what the Lord hath done in them), that doth not give evidence of a miserably unmortified heart? If vain spending of time, idleness, unprofitableness in men's places, envy, strife, variance, emulations, wrath, pride, worldliness, selfishness, 1 Cor. i., be badges of Christians, we have them on us and amongst us in abundance. And if it be so with them who have much light, and which, we hope, is saving, what shall we say of some who would be accounted religious and yet despise gospel light, and for the duty we have in hand, know no more of it but what consists in men's denying themselves sometimes in outward enjoyments, which is one of the outmost branches of it, which yet they will seldom practise? The good Lord send out a spirit of mortification to cure our distempers, or we are in a sad condition!

There are two evils which certainly attend every unmortified professor;—the first, in himself; the other, in respect of others:—

1. *In himself.* Let him pretend what he will, he hath *slight thoughts of sin;* at least, of sins of daily infirmity. The root of an unmortified course is the digestion of sin without bitterness in the heart. When a man hath confirmed his imagination to such an apprehension of grace and mercy as to be able, without bitterness, to swallow and digest daily sins, that man is at the very brink of turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Neither is there a greater evidence of a false and rotten heart in the world than to drive such a trade. To use the blood of Christ, which is given to *cleanse* us, 1 John i. 7, Tit. ii. 14; the exaltation of Christ, which is to give us *repentance*, Acts v. 31; the doctrine of grace, which teaches us to *deny all ungodliness*, Tit. ii. 11, 12, to countenance sin, is a rebellion that in the issue will break the bones. At this door have gone out from us most of the professors that have apostatized in the days wherein we live. For a while they were most of them under convictions; these kept them unto duties, and brought them to profession; so they "escaped the pollutions that are in the world, through the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," 2 Pet. ii. 20: but having got an acquaintance with the doctrine of the gospel, and being weary of duty, for which they had no principle, they began to countenance themselves in manifold neglects from the doctrine of grace. Now, when once this evil had laid hold of them, they speedily tumbled into perdition.

2. *To others.* It hath an evil influence on them on a twofold account:—

(1.) It *hardens* them, by begetting in them a persuasion that they are in as good condition as the best professors. Whatever they see in them is so stained for want of this mortification that it is of no

Digitized by Google

value with them. They have a zeal for religion; but it is accompanied with want of forbearance and universal righteousness. They deny prodigality, but with worldliness; they separate from the world, but live wholly to themselves, taking no care to exercise loving-kindness in the earth; or they talk spiritually, and live vainly; mention communion with God, and are every way conformed to the world; boasting of forgiveness of sin, and never forgiving others. And with such considerations do poor creatures harden their hearts in their unregeneracy.

(2.) They *deceive* them, in making them believe that if they can come up to their condition it shall be well with them; and so it grows an easy thing to have the great temptation of repute in religion to wrestle withal, when they may go far beyond them as to what appears in them, and yet come short of eternal life. But of these things and all the evils of unmortified walking, afterward.

CHAPTER III.

The second general principle of the means of mortification proposed to confirmation—The Spirit the only author of this work—Vanity of popish mortification discovered—Many means of it used by them not appointed of God—Those appointed by him abused—The mistakes of others in this business—The Spirit is promised believers for this work, Ezek. xi. 19, xxxvi. 26—All that we receive from Christ is by the Spirit—How the Spirit mortifies sin—Gal. v. 19–23—The several ways of his operation to this end proposed—How his work and our duty.

THE next principle relates to the great sovereign cause of the mortification treated of; which, in the words laid for the foundation of this discourse, is said to be the Spirit,—that is, the Holy Ghost, as was evinced.

II. *He only is sufficient for this work; all ways and means without him are as a thing of nought; and he is the great efficient of it,—he works in us as he pleases.*

1. In vain do men seek other remedies; they shall not be healed by them. What several ways have been prescribed for this, to have sin mortified, is known. The greatest part of popish religion, of that which looks most like religion in their profession, consists in mistaken ways and means of mortification. This is the pretence of their rough garments, whereby they deceive. Their vows, orders, fastings, penances, are all built on this ground; they are all for the mortifying of sin. Their preachings, sermons, and books of devotion, they

Digitized by Google

look all this way. Hence, those who interpret the locusts that came out of the bottomless pit, Rev. ix. 3, to be the friars of the Romish church, who are said to torment men, so "that they should seek death and not find it," verse 6, think that they did it by their stinging sermons, whereby they convinced them of sin, but being not able to discover the remedy for the healing and mortifying of it, they kept them in such perpetual anguish and terror, and such trouble in their consciences, that they desired to die. This, I say, is the substance and glory of their religion; but what with their labouring to mortify dead creatures, ignorant of the nature and end of the work,—what with the poison they mixed with it, in their persuasion of its merit, yea, *supererogation* (as they style their unnecessary merit, with a proud, barbarous title),—their glory is their shame: but of them and their mortification more afterward, chap. vii.

That the ways and means to be used for the mortification of sin invented by them are still insisted on and prescribed, for the same end, by some who should have more light and knowledge of the gospel, is known. Such directions to this purpose have of late been given by some, and are greedily catched at by others professing themselves Protestants, as might have become popish devotionists three or four hundred years ago. Such outside endeavours, such bodily exercises, such self-performances, such merely legal duties, without the least mention of Christ or his Spirit, are varnished over with swelling words of vanity, for the only means and expedients for the mortification of sin, as discover a deep-rooted unacquaintedness with the power of God and mystery of the gospel. The consideration hereof was one motive to the publishing of this plain discourse.

Now, the reasons why the Papists can never, with all their endeavours, truly mortify any one sin, amongst others, are,—

(1.) Because many of the ways and means they use and insist upon for this end were never appointed of God for that purpose. (Now, there is nothing in religion that hath any efficacy for compassing an end, but it hath it from God's appointment of it to that purpose.) Such as these are their rough garments, their vows, penances, disciplines, their course of monastical life, and the like; concerning all which God will say, "Who hath required these things at your hand?" and, "In vain do ye worship me, teaching for doctrines the traditions of men." Of the same nature are sundry self-vexations insisted on by others.

(2.) Because those things that are appointed of God as means are not used by them in their due place and order,—such as are praying, fasting, watching, meditation, and the like. These have their use in the business in hand; but whereas they are all to be looked on as streams, they look on them as the fountain. Whereas they effect and

Digitized by Google

accomplish the end as means only, subordinate to the Spirit and faith, they look on them to do it by virtue of the work wrought. If they fast so much, and pray so much, and keep their hours and times, the work is done. As the apostle says of some in another case, "They are always learning, never coming to the knowledge of the truth;" so they are always mortifying, but never come to any sound mortification. In a word, they have sundry means to mortify the natural man, as to the natural life here we lead; none to mortify lust or corruption.

This is the general mistake of men ignorant of the gospel about this thing; and it lies at the bottom of very much of that superstition and will-worship that hath been brought into the world. What horrible self-macerations were practised by some of the ancient authors of monastical devotion! what violence did they offer to nature! what extremity of sufferings did they put themselves upon! Search their ways and principles to the bottom, and you will find that it had no other root but this mistake, namely, that attempting rigid mortification, they fell upon the natural man instead of the corrupt old man,—upon the body wherein we live instead of the body of death.

Neither will the natural Popery that is in others do it. Men are galled with the guilt of a sin that hath prevailed over them; they instantly promise to themselves and God that they will do so no more; they watch over themselves, and pray for a season, until this heat waxes cold, and the sense of sin is worn off: and so mortification goes also, and sin returns to its former dominion. Duties are excellent food for an unhealthy soul; they are no physic for a sick soul. He that turns his meat into his medicine must expect no great operation. Spiritually sick men cannot sweat out their distemper with working. But this is the way of men who deceive their own souls; as we shall see afterward.

That none of these ways are sufficient is evident from the nature of the work itself that is to be done; it is a work that requires so many concurrent actings in it as no self-endeavour can reach unto, and is of that kind that an almighty energy is necessary for its accomplishment; as shall be afterward manifested.

2. It is, then, the work of the Spirit. For,—

(1.) He is *promised* of God to be given unto us to do this work. The taking away of the stony heart,—that is, the stubborn, proud, rebellious, unbelieving heart,—is in general the work of mortification that we treat of. Now this is still promised to be done by the Spirit, Ezek. xi. 19, xxxvi. 26, "I will give my Spirit, and take away the stony heart;" and by the Spirit of God is this work wrought when all means fail, Isa. lvii. 17, 18.

Digitized by Google

(2.) We have all our mortification from the *gift* of Christ, and all the gifts of Christ are communicated to us and given us by the Spirit of Christ: "Without Christ we can do nothing," John xv. 5. All communications of supplies and relief, in the beginnings, increasings, actings of any grace whatever, from him, are by the Spirit, by whom he alone works in and upon believers. From him we have our mortification: "He is exalted and made a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance unto us," Acts v. 31; and of our repentance our mortification is no small portion. How doth he do it? Having "received the promise of the Holy Ghost," he sends him abroad for that end, Acts ii. 33. You know the manifold promises he made of sending the Spirit, as Tertullian speaks, "Vicariam navare operam," to do the works that he had to accomplish in us.

The resolution of one or two questions will now lead me nearer to what I principally intend.

The first is, *How doth the Spirit mortify sin?*

I answer, in general, three ways:—

[1.] By causing our hearts to abound in *grace* and the fruits that are contrary to the flesh, and the fruits thereof and principles of them. So the apostle opposes the fruits of the flesh and of the Spirit: "The fruits of the flesh," says he, "are so and so," Gal. v. 19–21; "but," says he, "the fruits of the Spirit are quite contrary, quite of another sort," verses 22, 23. Yea; but what if these are in us and do abound, may not the other abound also? No, says he, verse 24, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." But how? Why, verse 25, "By living in the Spirit and walking after the Spirit;"—that is, by the abounding of these graces of the Spirit in us, and walking according to them. For, saith the apostle, "These are contrary one to another," verse 17; so that they cannot both be in the same subject, in any intense or high degree. This "renewing of us by the Holy Ghost," as it is called, Tit. iii. 5, is one great way of mortification; he causes us to grow, thrive, flourish, and abound in those graces which are contrary, opposite, and destructive to all the fruits of the flesh, and to the quiet or thriving of indwelling sin itself.

[2.] By a *real physical efficiency* on the root and habit of sin, for the weakening, destroying, and taking it away. Hence he is called a "Spirit of judgment and burning," Isa. iv. 4, really consuming and destroying our lusts. He takes away the stony heart by an almighty efficiency; for as he begins the work as to its kind, so he carries it on as to its degrees. He is the fire which burns up the very root of lust.

[3.] He brings the *cross of Christ* into the heart of a sinner by faith, and gives us communion with Christ in his death, and fellowship in his sufferings: of the manner whereof more afterward.

Digitized by Google

Secondly. If this be the work of the Spirit alone, how is it that we are exhorted to it?—seeing the Spirit of God only can do it, let the work be left wholly to him.

[1.] It is no otherwise the work of the Spirit but as all graces and good works which are in us are his. He "works in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure," Phil. ii. 13; he works "all our works in us," Isa. xxvi. 12,—"the work of faith with power," 2 Thess. i. 11, Col. ii. 12; he causes us to pray, and is a "Spirit of supplication," Rom. viii. 26, Zech. xii. 10; and yet we are exhorted, and are to be exhorted, to all these.

[2.] He doth not so work our mortification in us as not to keep it still an act of our *obedience*. The Holy Ghost works in us and upon us, as we are fit to be wrought in and upon; that is, so as to preserve our own liberty and free obedience. He works upon our understandings, wills, consciences, and affections, agreeably to their own natures; he works *in us* and *with us*, not *against us* or *without us;* so that his assistance is an encouragement as to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect as to the work itself. And, indeed, I might here bewail the endless, foolish labour of poor souls, who, being convinced of sin, and not able to stand against the power of their convictions, do set themselves, by innumerable perplexing ways and duties, to keep down sin, but, being strangers to the Spirit of God, all in vain. They combat without victory, have war without peace, and are in slavery all their days. They spend their strength for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which profiteth not.

This is the saddest warfare that any poor creature can be engaged in. A soul under the power of conviction from the law is pressed to fight against sin, but hath no strength for the combat. They cannot but fight, and they can never conquer; they are like men thrust on the sword of enemies on purpose to be slain. The *law* drives them on, and sin beats them back. Sometimes they think, indeed, that they have foiled sin, when they have only raised a dust that they see it not; that is, they distemper their natural affections of fear, sorrow, and anguish, which makes them believe that sin is conquered when it is not touched. By that time they are cold, they must to the battle again; and the lust which they thought to be slain appears to have had no wound.

And if the case be so sad with them who do labour and strive, and yet enter not into the kingdom, what is their condition who despise all this; who are perpetually under the power and dominion of sin, and love to have it so; and are troubled at nothing, but that they cannot make sufficient provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof?

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV.

The last principle; of the usefulness of mortification—The vigour and comfort of our spiritual lives depend on our mortification—In what sense—Not absolutely and necessarily; Ps. lxxxviii., Heman's condition—Not as on the next and immediate cause—As a means; by removing of the contrary—The desperate effects of any unmortified lust; it weakens the soul, Ps. xxxviii. 3, 8, sundry ways, and darkens it—All graces improved by the mortification of sin—The best evidence of sincerity.

THE last principle I shall insist on (omitting, first, the necessity of mortification unto life, and, secondly, the certainty of life upon mortification) is,—

III. *That the life, vigour, and comfort of our spiritual life depend much on our mortification of sin.*

Strength and comfort, and power and peace, in our walking with God, are the things of our desires. Were any of us asked seriously, what it is that troubles us, we must refer it to one of these heads: —either we want strength or power, vigour and life, in our obedience, in our walking with God; or we want peace, comfort, and consolation therein. Whatever it is that may befall a believer that doth not belong to one of these two heads, doth not deserve to be mentioned in the days of our complaints.

Now, all these do much depend on a constant course of mortification, concerning which observe,—

1. I do not say they proceed from it, as though they were *necessarily* tied to it. A man may be carried on in a constant course of mortification all his days; and yet perhaps never enjoy a good day of peace and consolation. So it was with Heman, Ps. lxxxviii.; his life was a life of perpetual mortification and walking with God, yet terrors and wounds were his portion all his days. But God singled out Heman, a choice friend, to make him an example to them that afterward should be in distress. Canst thou complain if it be no otherwise with thee than it was with Heman, that eminent servant of God? and this shall be his praise to the end of the world. God makes it his prerogative to speak peace and consolation, Isa. lvii. 18, 19. "I will do that work," says God, "I will comfort him," verse 18. But how? By an immediate work of the new creation: "I create it," says God. The *use of means* for the obtaining of peace is ours; the *bestowing* of it is God's prerogative.

2. In the ways instituted by God for to give us life, vigour, courage, and consolation, mortification is not one of the immediate causes of it. They are the privileges of our adoption made known to our souls that give us immediately these things. "The Spirit bearing witness

Digitized by Google

with our spirits that we are the children of God," giving us a new name and a white stone, adoption and justification,—that is, as to the sense and knowledge of them,—are the immediate causes (in the hand of the Spirit) of these things. But this I say,—

3. In our ordinary walking with God, and in an ordinary course of his dealing with us, the vigour and comfort of our spiritual lives depend much on our mortification, not only as a "causa sine qua non," but as a thing that hath an effectual influence thereinto. For,—

(1.) This alone keeps sin from depriving us of the one and the other.

Every unmortified sin will certainly do two things:—[1.] It will *weaken* the soul, and deprive it of its vigour. [2.] It will *darken* the soul, and deprive it of its comfort and peace.

[1.] It *weakens* the soul, and deprives it of its strength. When David had for a while harboured an unmortified lust in his heart, it broke all his bones, and left him no spiritual strength; hence he complained that he was sick, weak, wounded, faint. "There is," saith he, "no soundness in me," Ps. xxxviii. 3; "I am feeble and sore broken," verse 8; "yea, I cannot so much as look up," Ps. xl. 12. An unmortified lust will drink up the spirit, and all the vigour of the soul, and weaken it for all duties. For,—

1*st.* It *untunes*, and unframes the heart itself, by entangling its affections. It diverts the heart from the spiritual frame that is required for vigorous communion with God; it lays hold on the affections, rendering its object beloved and desirable, so expelling the love of the Father, 1 John ii. 15, iii. 17; so that the soul cannot say uprightly and truly to God, "Thou art my portion," having something else that it loves. Fear, desire, hope, which are the choice affections of the soul, that should be full of God, will be one way or other entangled with it.

2*dly.* It fills the *thoughts* with contrivances about it. Thoughts are the great purveyors of the soul to bring in provision to satisfy its affections; and if sin remain unmortified in the heart, they must ever and anon be making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. They must glaze, adorn, and dress the objects of the flesh, and bring them home to give satisfaction; and this they are able to do, in the service of a defiled imagination, beyond all expression.

3*dly.* It breaks out and actually hinders duty. The ambitious man must be studying, and the worldling must be working or contriving, and the sensual, vain person providing himself for vanity, when they should be engaged in the worship of God

Were this my present business, to set forth the breaches, ruin, weakness, desolations, that one unmortified lust will bring upon a soul, this discourse must be extended much beyond my intendment.

Digitized by Google

[2.] As sin *weakens*, so it *darkens* the soul. It is a cloud, a thick cloud, that spreads itself over the face of the soul, and intercepts all the beams of God's love and favour. It takes away all sense of the privilege of our adoption; and if the soul begins to gather up thoughts of consolation, sin quickly scatters them: of which afterward.

Now, in this regard doth the vigour and power of our spiritual life depend on our mortification: It is the only means of the removal of that which will allow us neither the one nor the other. Men that are sick and wounded under the power of lust make many applications for help; they cry to God when the perplexity of their thoughts overwhelms them, even to God do they cry, but are not delivered; in vain do they use many remedies,—"they shall not be healed." So, Hos. v. 13, "Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound," and attempted sundry remedies: nothing will do until they come (verse 15) to "acknowledge their offence." Men may see their sickness and wounds, but yet, if they make not due applications, their cure will not be effected.

(2.) Mortification prunes all the graces of God, and makes room for them in our hearts to grow. The life and vigour of our spiritual lives consists in the vigour and flourishing of the plants of grace in our hearts. Now, as you may see in a garden, let there be a precious herb planted, and let the ground be untilled, and weeds grow about it, perhaps it will live still, but be a poor, withering, unuseful thing. You must look and search for it, and sometimes can scarce find it; and when you do, you can scarce know it, whether it be the plant you look for or no; and suppose it be, you can make no use of it at all. When, let another of the same kind be set in the ground, naturally as barren and bad as the other, but let it be well weeded, and every thing that is noxious and hurtful removed from it,—it flourishes and thrives; you may see it at first look into the garden, and have it for your use when you please. So it is with the graces of the Spirit that are planted in our hearts. That is true; they *are* still, they abide in a heart where there is some neglect of mortification; but they are ready to die, Rev. iii. 2, they are withering and decaying. The heart is like the sluggard's field,—so overgrown with weeds that you can scarce see the good corn. Such a man may search for faith, love, and zeal, and scarce be able to find any; and if he do discover that these graces are there yet alive and sincere, yet they are so weak, so clogged with lusts, that they are of very little use; they remain, indeed, but are ready to die. But now let the heart be cleansed by mortification, the weeds of lust constantly and daily rooted up (as they spring daily, nature being their proper soil), let room be made for grace to thrive and flourish,—how will every grace act its part, and be ready for every use and purpose!

Digitized by Google

(3.) As to our peace; as there is nothing that hath any evidence of sincerity without it, so I know nothing that hath such an evidence of sincerity in it;—which is no small foundation of our peace. Mortification is the soul's vigorous opposition to self, wherein sincerity is most evident.

CHAPTER V.

The principal intendment of the whole discourse proposed—The first main case of conscience stated—What it is to mortify any sin, negatively considered—Not the utter destruction of it in this life—Not the dissimulation of it—Not the improvement of any natural principle—Not the diversion of it—Not an occasional conquest—Occasional conquests of sin, what and when; upon the eruption of sin; in time of danger or trouble.

THESE things being premised, I come to my principal intention, of handling some questions or practical cases that present themselves in this business of mortification of sin in believers.

The first, which is the head of all the rest, and whereunto they are reduced, may be considered as lying under the ensuing proposal:—

Suppose a man to be a true believer, and yet finds in himself a powerful indwelling sin, leading him captive to the law of it, consuming his heart with trouble, perplexing his thoughts, weakening his soul as to duties of communion with God, disquieting him as to peace, and perhaps defiling his conscience, and exposing him to hardening through the deceitfulness of sin,—what shall he do? what course shall he take and insist on for the mortification of this sin, lust, distemper, or corruption, to such a degree as that, though it be not utterly destroyed, yet, in his contest with it, he may be enabled to keep up power, strength, and peace in communion with God?

In answer to this important inquiry, I shall do these things:—

I. Show what it is to mortify any sin, and that both negatively and positively, that we be not mistaken in the foundation.

II. Give general directions for such things as without which it will be utterly impossible for any one to get any sin truly and spiritually mortified.

III. Draw out the particulars whereby this is to be done; in the whole carrying on this consideration, that it is not of the doctrine of mortification in general, but only in reference to the particular case before proposed, that I am treating.

I. 1. (1.) To mortify a sin is not utterly to *kill*, root it out, and

Digitized by Google

destroy it, that it should have no more hold at all nor residence in our hearts. It is true this is that which is aimed at; but this is not in this life to be accomplished. There is no man that truly sets himself to mortify any sin, but he aims at, intends, desires its utter destruction, that it should leave neither root nor fruit in the heart or life. He would so kill it that it should never move nor stir any more, cry or call, seduce or tempt, to eternity. Its *not-being* is the thing aimed at. Now, though doubtless there may, by the Spirit and grace of Christ, a wonderful success and eminency of victory against any sin be attained, so that a man may have almost constant triumph over it, yet an utter killing and destruction of it, that it should not be, is not in this life to be expected. This Paul assures us of, Phil. iii. 12, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." He was a *choice saint*, a pattern for believers, who, in faith and love, and all the fruits of the Spirit, had not his fellow in the world, and on that account ascribes perfection to himself in comparison of others, verse 15; yet he had not "attained," he was not "perfect," but was "following after:" still a vile body he had, and we have, that must be changed by the great power of Christ at last, verse 21. This we would have; but God sees it best for us that we should be complete in nothing in ourselves, that in all things we must be "complete in Christ;" which is best for us, Col. ii. 10.

(2.) I think I need not say it is not the *dissimulation* of a sin. When a man on some outward respects forsakes the practice of any sin, men perhaps may look on him as a changed man. God knows that to his former iniquity he hath added cursed hypocrisy, and is got in a safer path to hell than he was in before. He hath got another heart than he had, that is more cunning; not a new heart, that is more holy.

(3.) The mortification of sin consists not in the improvement of a *quiet, sedate* nature. Some men have an advantage by their natural constitution so far as that they are not exposed to such violence of unruly passions and tumultuous affections as many others are. Let now these men cultivate and improve their natural frame and temper by discipline, consideration, and prudence, and they may seem to themselves and others very mortified men, when, perhaps, their hearts are a standing sink of all abominations. Some man is never so much troubled all his life, perhaps, with anger and passion, nor doth trouble others, as another is almost every day; and yet the latter hath done more to the mortification of the sin than the former. Let not such persons try their mortification by such things as their natural temper gives no life or vigour to. Let them bring themselves to self-denial, unbelief, envy, or some such spiritual sin, and they will have a better view of themselves.

Digitized by Google

(4.) A sin is not mortified when it is only diverted. Simon Magus for a season left his *sorceries;* but his *covetousness and ambition,* that set him on work, remained still, and would have been acting another way. Therefore Peter tells him, "I perceive thou art in the gall of bitterness;"—"Notwithstanding the profession thou hast made, notwithstanding thy relinquishment of thy sorceries, thy lust is as powerful as ever in thee; the same lust, only the streams of it are diverted. It now exerts and puts forth itself another way, but it is the old gall of bitterness still." A man may be sensible of a lust, set himself against the eruptions of it, take care that it shall not break forth as it has done, but in the meantime suffer the same corrupted habit to vent itself some other way; as he who heals and skins a running sore thinks himself cured, but in the meantime his flesh festereth by the corruption of the same humour, and breaks out in another place. And this diversion, with the alterations that attend it, often befalls men on accounts wholly foreign unto grace: change of the course of life that a man was in, of relations, interests, designs, may effect it; yea, the very alterations in men's constitutions, occasioned by a natural progress in the course of their lives, may produce such changes as these. Men in age do not usually persist in the pursuit of youthful lusts, although they have never mortified any one of them. And the same is the case of bartering of lusts, and leaving to serve one that a man may serve another. He that changes pride for worldliness, sensuality for Pharisaism, vanity in himself to the contempt of others, let him not think that he hath mortified the sin that he seems to have left. He hath changed his master, but is a servant still.

(5.) *Occasional conquests* of sin do not amount to a mortifying of it. There are two occasions or seasons wherein a man who is contending with any sin may seem to himself to have mortified it:—

[1.] When it hath had some sad *eruption,* to the disturbance of his peace, terror of his conscience, dread of scandal, and evident provocation of God. This awakens and stirs up all that is in the man, and amazes him, fills him with abhorrency of sin, and himself for it; sends him to God, makes him cry out as for life, to abhor his lust as hell, and to set himself against it. The whole man, spiritual and natural, being now awaked, sin shrinks in its head, appears not, but lies as dead before him: as when one that hath drawn nigh to an army in the night, and hath killed a principal person,—instantly the guards awake, men are roused up, and strict inquiry is made after the enemy, who, in the meantime, until the noise and tumult be over, hides himself, or lies like one that is dead, yet with firm resolution to do the like mischief again upon the like opportunity. Upon the sin among the Corinthians, see how they muster up themselves

Digitized by Google

for the surprisal and destruction of it, 2 Epist. chap. vii. 11. So it is in a person when a breach hath been made upon his conscience, quiet, perhaps credit, by his lust, in some eruption of actual sin;—carefulness, indignation, desire, fear, revenge, are all set on work about it and against it, and lust is quiet for a season, being run down before them; but when the hurry is over and the inquest past, the thief appears again alive, and is as busy as ever at his work.

[2.] In a time of some *judgment*, calamity, or pressing affliction; the heart is then taken up with thoughts and contrivances of flying from the present troubles, fears, and dangers. This, as a convinced person concludes, is to be done only by relinquishment of sin, which gains peace with God. It is the anger of God in every affliction that galls a convinced person. To be quit of this, men resolve at such times against their sins. Sin shall never more have any place in them; they will never again give up themselves to the service of it. Accordingly, sin is quiet, stirs not, seems to be mortified; not, indeed, that it hath received any one wound, but merely because the soul hath possessed its faculties, whereby it should exert itself, with thoughts inconsistent with the motions thereof; which, when they are laid aside, sin returns again to its former life and vigour. So they Ps. lxxviii. 32–37, are a full instance and description of this frame of spirit whereof I speak: "For all this they sinned still, and believed not for his wondrous works. Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble. When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant." I no way doubt but that when they sought, and returned, and inquired early after God, they did it with full purpose of heart as to the relinquishment of their sins; it is expressed in the word "returned." To turn or return to the Lord is by a relinquishment of sin. This they did "early,"—with earnestness and diligence; but yet their sin was unmortified for all this, verses 36, 37. And this is the state of many humiliations in the days of affliction, and a great deceit in the hearts of believers themselves lies oftentimes herein.

These and many other ways there are whereby poor souls deceive themselves, and suppose they have mortified their lusts, when they live and are mighty, and on every occasion break forth, to their disturbance and disquietness.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI.

The mortification of sin in particular described—The several parts and degrees thereof—The habitual weakening of its root and principle—The power of lust to tempt—Differences of that power as to persons and times—Constant fighting against sin—The parts thereof considered—Success against it—The sum of this discourse considered.

WHAT it is to mortify a sin in general, which will make farther way for particular directions, is nextly to be considered.

2. The mortification of a lust consists in three things:—

(1.) An *habitual* weakening of it. Every lust is a depraved habit or disposition, continually inclining the heart to evil. Thence is that description of him who hath no lust truly mortified, Gen. vi. 5, "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually." He is always under the power of a strong bent and inclination to sin. And the reason why a natural man is not always perpetually in the pursuit of some one lust, night and day, is because he hath many to serve, every one crying to be satisfied; thence he is carried on with great variety, but still in general he lies towards the satisfaction of self.

We will suppose, then, the lust or distemper whose mortification is inquired after to be in itself a strong, deeply-rooted, habitual inclination and bent of will and affections unto some actual sin, as to the matter of it, though not, under that formal consideration, always stirring up imaginations, thoughts, and contrivances about the object of it. Hence, men are said to have their "hearts set upon evil," the bent of their spirits lies towards it, to make "provision for the flesh."[1] And a sinful, depraved habit, as in many other things, so in this, differs from all natural or moral habits whatever: for whereas they incline the soul gently and suitably to itself, sinful habits impel with violence and impetuousness; whence lusts are said to fight or wage "war against the soul,"[2] 1 Pet. ii. 11,—to rebel or rise up in war with that conduct and opposition which is usual therein,[3] Rom. vii. 23,—to lead captive, or effectually captivating upon success in battle,—all works of great violence and impetuousness.

I might manifest fully, from that description we have of it, Rom. vii., how it will darken the mind, extinguish convictions, dethrone reason, interrupt the power and influence of any considerations that may be brought to hamper it, and break through all into a flame. But this is not my present business. Now, the first thing in mor-

[1] Rom. xiii. 14.

[2] Στρατιύονται κατὰ τῆς ψυχῆς.

[3] Ἀντιστρατιύόμενον, αἰχμαλωτίζοντα.

Digitized by Google

tification is the weakening of this habit of sin or lust, that it shall not, with that violence, earnestness, frequency, rise up, conceive, tumultuate, provoke, entice, disquiet, as naturally it is apt to do, James i. 14, 15.

I shall desire to give one caution or rule by the way, and it is this: Though every lust doth in its own nature equally, universally, incline and impel to sin, yet this must be granted with these two limitations:—

[1.] *One lust*, or a lust in one man, may receive many accidental improvements, heightenings, and strengthenings, which may give it life, power, and vigour, exceedingly above what another lust hath, or the same lust (that is, of the same kind and nature) in another man. When a lust falls in with the natural constitutions and temper, with a suitable course of life, with occasions, or when Satan hath got a fit handle to it to manage it, as he hath a thousand ways so to do, that lust grows violent and impetuous above others, or more than the same lust in another man; then the steams of it darken the mind so, that though a man knows the same things as formerly, yet they have no power nor influence on the will, but corrupt affections and passions are set by it at liberty.

But especially, lust gets strength by *temptation*. When a suitable temptation falls in with a lust, it gives it a new life, vigour, power, violence, and rage, which it seemed not before to have or to be capable of. Instances to this purpose might be multiplied; but it is the design of some part of another treatise to evince this observation.

[2.] Some lusts are far more sensible and discernible in their violent actings than others. Paul puts a difference between uncleanness and all other sins: 1 Cor. vi. 18, "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body." Hence, the motions of that sin are more sensible, more discernible than of others; when perhaps the love of the world, or the like, is in a person no less habitually predominant than that, yet it makes not so great a combustion in the whole man.

And on this account some men may go in their own thoughts and in the eyes of the world for mortified men, who yet have in them no less predominancy of lust than those who cry out with astonishment upon the account of its perplexing tumultuatings, yea, than those who have by the power of it been hurried into scandalous sins; only their lusts are in and about things which raise not such a tumult in the soul, about which they are exercised with a calmer frame of spirit, the very fabric of nature being not so nearly concerned in them as in some other.

Digitized by Google

I say, then, that the first thing in mortification is the *weakening* of this habit, that it shall not impel and tumultuate as formerly; that it shall not entice and draw aside; that it shall not disquiet and perplex the killing of its life, vigour, promptness, and readiness to be stirring. This is called "crucifying the flesh with the lusts thereof," Gal. v. 24; that is, taking away its blood and spirits that give it strength and power,—the wasting of the body of death "day by day," 2 Cor. iv. 16.

As a man *nailed to the cross;* he first struggles, and strives, and cries out with great strength and might, but, as his blood and spirits waste, his strivings are faint and seldom, his cries low and hoarse, scarce to be heard;—when a man first sets on a lust or distemper, to deal with it, it struggles with great violence to break loose; it cries with earnestness and impatience to be satisfied and relieved; but when by mortification the blood and spirits of it are let out, it moves seldom and faintly, cries sparingly, and is scarce heard in the heart; it may have sometimes a dying pang, that makes an appearance of great vigour and strength, but it is quickly over, especially if it be kept from considerable success. This the apostle describes, as in the whole chapter, so especially, Rom. vi. 6.

"Sin," saith he, "is crucified; it is fastened to the cross." To what end? "That the body of death may be destroyed," the power of sin weakened and abolished by little and little, that "henceforth we should not serve sin;" that is, that sin might not incline, impel us with such efficacy as to make us servants to it, as it hath done heretofore. And this is spoken not only with respect to carnal and sensual affections, or desires of worldly things,—not only in respect of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life,—but also as to the flesh, that is, in the mind and will, in that opposition unto God which is in us by nature. Of what nature soever the troubling distemper be, by what ways soever it make itself out, either by impelling to evil or hindering from that which is good, the rule is the same; and unless this be done effectually, all after-contention will not compass the end aimed at A man may beat down the bitter fruit from an evil tree until he is weary; whilst the root abides in strength and vigour, the beating down of the present fruit will not hinder it from bringing forth more. This is the folly of some men; they set themselves with all earnestness and diligence against the appearing eruption of lust, but, leaving the principle and root untouched, perhaps unsearched out, they make but little or no progress in this work of mortification.

(2.) In constant *fighting* and *contending* against sin. To be able always to be laying load on sin is no small degree of mortification. When sin is strong and vigorous, the soul is scarce able to make any

Digitized by Google

head against it; it sighs, and groans, and mourns, and is troubled, as David speaks of himself, but seldom has sin in the pursuit. David complains that his sin had "taken fast hold upon him, that he could not look up," Ps. xl. 12. How little, then, was he able to fight against it! Now, sundry things are required unto and comprised in this fighting against sin:—

[1.] To *know* that a man hath such an enemy to deal withal, to take notice of it, to consider it as an enemy indeed, and one that is to be destroyed by all means possible, is required hereunto. As I said before, the contest is vigorous and hazardous,—it is about the things of eternity. When, therefore, men have slight and transient thoughts of their lusts, it is no great sign that they are mortified, or that they are in a way for their mortification. This is every man's "knowing the plague of his own heart," 1 Kings viii. 38, without which no other work can be done. It is to be feared that very many have little knowledge of the main enemy that they carry about with them in their bosoms. This makes them ready to justify themselves, and to be impatient of reproof or admonition, not knowing that they are in any danger, 2 Chron. xvi. 10.

[2.] To labour to be acquainted with the ways, wiles, methods, advantages, and occasions of its *success*, is the beginning of this warfare. So do men deal with enemies. They inquire out their counsels and designs, ponder their ends, consider how and by what means they have formerly prevailed, that they may be prevented. In this consists the greatest skill in conduct. Take this away, and all waging of war, wherein is the greatest improvement of human wisdom and industry, would be brutish. So do they deal with lust who mortify it indeed. Not only when it is actually vexing, enticing, and seducing, but in their retirements they consider, "This is our enemy; this is his way and progress, these are his advantages, thus hath he prevailed, and thus he will do, if not prevented." So David, "My sin is ever before me," Ps. li. 3. And, indeed, one of the choicest and most eminent parts of practically spiritual wisdom consists in finding out the subtilties, policies, and depths of any indwelling sin; to consider and know wherein its greatest strength lies,—what advantage it uses to make of occasions, opportunities, temptations,—what are its pleas, pretences, reasonings,—what its stratagems, colours, excuses; to set the wisdom of the Spirit against the craft of the *old man;* to trace this serpent in all its turnings and windings; to be able to say, at its most secret and (to a common frame of heart) imperceptible actings, "This is your old way and course; I know what you aim at;"—and so to be always in readiness is a good part of our warfare.

[3.] To load it daily with all the things which shall after be mentioned, that are grievous, killing, and destructive to it, is the height

Digitized by Google

of this contest. Such a one never thinks his lust dead because it is quiet, but labours still to give it new wounds, new blows every day. So the apostle, Col. iii. 5.

Now, whilst the soul is in this condition, whilst it is thus dealing, it is certainly uppermost; sin is under the sword and *dying*.

(3.) In *success*. Frequent success against any lust is another part and evidence of mortification. By success I understand not a mere disappointment of sin, that it be not brought forth nor accomplished, but a victory over it, and pursuit of it to a complete conquest. For instance, when the heart finds sin at any time at work, seducing, forming imaginations to make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof, it instantly apprehends sin, and brings it to the law of God and love of Christ, condemns it, follows it with execution to the uttermost.

Now, I say, when a man comes to this state and condition, that lust is weakened in the root and principle, that its motions and actions are fewer and weaker than formerly, so that they are not able to hinder his duty nor interrupt his peace,—when he can, in a quiet, sedate frame of spirit, find out and fight against sin, and have success against it,—then sin is mortified in some considerable measure, and, notwithstanding all its opposition, a man may have peace with God all his days.

Unto these heads, then, do I refer the mortification aimed at; that is, of any one perplexing distemper, whereby the general pravity and corruption of our nature attempts to exert and put forth itself:—

First, The *weakening* of its indwelling disposition, whereby it inclines, entices, impels to evil, rebels, opposes, fights against God, by the implanting, habitual residence, and cherishing of a principle of grace that stands in direct opposition to it and is destructive of it, is the foundation of it. So, by the implanting and growth of humility is pride weakened, passion by patience, uncleanness by purity of mind and conscience, love of this world by heavenly-mindedness: which are graces of the Spirit, or the same habitual grace variously acting itself by the Holy Ghost, according to the variety or diversity of the objects about which it is exercised; as the other are several lusts, or the same natural corruption variously acting itself, according to the various advantages and occasions that it meets withal.—The *promptness, alacrity, vigour* of the Spirit, or new man, in contending with, cheerful fighting against, the lust spoken of, by all the ways and with all the means that are appointed thereunto, constantly using the succours provided against its motions and actings, is a second thing hereunto required.—Success unto *several degrees* attends these two. Now this, if the distemper hath not an unconquerable advantage from its natural situation, may possibly be to

Digitized by Google

such a *universal* conquest as the soul may never more sensibly feel its opposition, and shall, however, assuredly arise to an allowance of peace to the conscience, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace.

CHAPTER VII.

General rules, without which no lust will be mortified—No mortification unless a man be a believer—Dangers of attempting mortification of sin by unregenerate persons—The duty of unconverted persons as to this business of mortification considered—The vanity of the Papists' attempts and rules for mortification thence discovered.

II. THE *ways* and *means* whereby a soul may proceed to the mortification of any particular lust and sin, which Satan takes advantage by to disquiet and weaken him, come next under consideration.

Now, there are some general considerations to be premised, concerning some principles and foundations of this work, without which no man in the world, be he never so much raised by convictions, and resolved for the mortification of any sin, can attain thereunto.

General rules and principles, without which no sin will be ever mortified, are these:—

1. *Unless a man be a believer,—that is, one that is truly* ingrafted into Christ,—*he can never mortify any one sin;* I do not say, unless he know himself to be so, but unless indeed he be so.

Mortification is the work of believers: Rom. viii. 13, "If ye through the Spirit," etc.,—ye *believers*, to whom there is no condemnation, verse 1. They alone are exhorted to it: Col. iii. 5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth." Who should mortify? You who "are risen with Christ," verse 1; whose "life is hid with Christ in God," verse 3; who "shall appear with him in glory," verse 4. An unregenerate man may do something like it; but the work itself, so as it may be acceptable with God, he can never perform. You know what a picture of it is drawn in some of the philosophers,—Seneca, Tully, Epictetus; what affectionate discourses they have of contempt of the world and self, of regulating and conquering all exorbitant affections and passions! The lives of most of them manifested that their maxims differed as much from true mortification as the sun painted on a sign-post from the sun in the firmament; they had neither light nor heat. Their own Lucian sufficiently manifests what they all were. There is no death of sin without the death of Christ. You know what attempts there are

Digitized by Google

made after it by the Papists, in their vows, penances, and satisfactions. I dare say of them (I mean as many of them as act upon the principles of their church, as they call it) what Paul says of Israel in point of righteousness, Rom. ix. 31, 32,—They have followed after mortification, but they have not attained to it. Wherefore? "Because they seek it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law." The same is the state and condition of all amongst ourselves who, in obedience to their convictions and awakened consciences, do attempt a relinquishment of sin;—they follow after it, but they do not attain it.

It is true, it *is*, it *will be*, required of every person whatever that hears the law or gospel preached, that he mortify sin. It is his *duty*, but it is not his *immediate duty;* it is his duty to do it, but to do it in God's way. If you require your servant to pay so much money for you in such a place, but first to go and take it up in another, it is his duty to pay the money appointed, and you will blame him if he do it not; yet it was not his immediate duty,—he was first to take it up, according to your direction. So it is in this case: sin is to be mortified, but something is to be done in the first place to enable us thereunto.

I have proved that it is the Spirit alone that can mortify sin; he is promised to do it, and all other means without him are empty and vain. How shall he, then, mortify sin that hath not the Spirit? A man may easier see without eyes, speak without a tongue, than truly mortify one sin without the Spirit. Now, how is he attained? It is the Spirit of Christ: and as the apostle says, "If we have not the Spirit of Christ, we are none of his," Rom. viii. 9; so, if we are Christ's, have an interest in him, we have the Spirit, and so alone have power for mortification. This the apostle discourses at large, Rom. viii. 8, "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." It is the inference and conclusion he makes of his foregoing discourse about our natural state and condition, and the enmity we have unto God and his law therein. If we are in the flesh, if we have not the Spirit, we cannot do any thing that should please God. But what is our deliverance from this condition? Verse 9, "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you;"—"Ye believers, that have the Spirit of Christ, ye are not in the flesh." There is no way of deliverance from the state and condition of being in the flesh but by the Spirit of Christ. And what if this Spirit of Christ be in you? Why, then, you are mortified; verse 10, "The body is dead because of sin," or unto it; mortification is carried on; the new man is quickened to righteousness. This the apostle proves, verse 11, from the union we have with Christ by the Spirit, which will produce suitable operations in us to what it wrought

Digitized by Google

in him. All attempts, then, for mortification of any lust, without an interest in Christ, are vain. Many men that are galled with and for sin, the arrows of Christ for conviction, by the preaching of the word, or some affliction having been made sharp in their hearts, do vigorously set themselves against this or that particular lust, wherewith their consciences have been most disquieted or perplexed. But, poor creatures! they labour in the fire, and their work consumeth. When the Spirit of Christ comes to this work he will be "like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap," and he will purge men as gold and as silver, Mal. iii. 2, 3,—take away their dross and tin, their filth and blood, as Isa. iv. 4; but men must be gold and silver in the bottom, or else refining will do them no good. The prophet gives us the sad issue of wicked men's utmost attempts for mortification, by what means soever that God affords them: Jer. vi. 29, 30, "The bellows are burned, and the lead is consumed of the fire; the founder melteth in vain. Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the LORD hath rejected them." And what is the reason hereof? Verse 28, They were "brass and iron" when they were put into the furnace. Men may refine brass and iron long enough before they will be good silver.

I say, then, mortification is not the *present* business of *unregenerate* men. God calls them not to it as yet; *conversion* is their work, —the conversion of the *whole* soul,—not the mortification of *this* or *that particular* lust. You would laugh at a man that you should see setting up a great fabric, and never take any care for a foundation; especially if you should see him so foolish as that, having a thousand experiences that what he built one day fell down another, he would yet continue in the same course. So it is with convinced persons; though they plainly see, that what ground they get against sin one day they lose another, yet they will go on in the same road still, without inquiring where the destructive flaw in their progress lies. When the Jews, upon the conviction of their sin, were cut to the heart, Acts ii. 37, and cried out, "What shall we do?" what doth Peter direct them to do? Does he bid them go and mortify their pride, wrath, malice, cruelty, and the like? No; he knew that was not their present work, but he calls them to conversion and faith in Christ in general, verse 38. Let the soul be first thoroughly converted, and then, "looking on Him whom they had pierced," humiliation and mortification will ensue. Thus, when John came to preach repentance and conversion, he said, "The axe is now laid to the root of the tree," Matt. iii. 10 The Pharisees had been laying heavy burdens, imposing tedious duties, and rigid means of mortification, in fastings, washings, and the like, all in vain. Says John, "The doctrine of conversion is for you; the axe in my hand is laid to the root." And our Saviour tells us what is to be done in this case;

Digitized by Google

says he, "Do men gather grapes from thorns?" Matt. vii. 16. But suppose a thorn be well pruned and cut, and have pains taken with him? "Yea, but he will never bear figs," verses 17, 18; it cannot be but every tree will bring forth fruit according to its own kind. What is then to be done, he tells us, Matt. xii. 33, "Make the tree good, and his fruit will be good." The root must be dealt with, the nature of the tree changed, or no good fruit will be brought forth.

This is that I aim at: unless a man be *regenerate*, unless he be a believer, all attempts that he can make for mortification, be they never so specious and promising,—all means he can use, let him follow them with never so much diligence, earnestness, watchfulness, and intention of mind and spirit,—are to no purpose. In vain shall he use many remedies; he shall not be healed. Yea, there are sundry desperate evils attending an endeavour in convinced persons, that are no more but so, to perform this duty:—

(1.) The mind and soul is taken up about that which is not the man's *proper business*, and so he is diverted from that which is so. God lays hold by his word and judgments on some sin in him, galls his conscience, disquiets his heart, deprives him of his rest; now other diversions will not serve his turn; he must apply himself to the work before him. The business in hand being to awake the whole man unto a consideration of the state and condition wherein he is, that he might be brought home to God, instead hereof he sets himself to mortify the sin that galls him,—which is a pure issue of self-love, to be freed from his trouble, and not at all to the work he is called unto,—and so is diverted from it. Thus God tells us of Ephraim, when he "spread his net upon them, and brought them down as the fowls of heaven, and chastised them," Hos. vii. 12, caught them, entangled them, convinced them that they could not escape; saith he of them, "They return, but not to the Most High;"—they set themselves to a relinquishment of sin, but not in that manner, by *universal conversion*, as God called for it. Thus are men diverted from coming unto God by the most glorious ways that they can fix upon to come to him by. And this is one of the most common deceits whereby men ruin their own souls. I wish that some whose trade it is to daub with untempered mortar in the things of God did not teach this deceit, and cause the people to err by their ignorance. What do men do, what ofttimes are they directed unto, when their consciences are galled by sin and disquietment from the Lord, who hath laid hold upon them? Is not a relinquishment of the sin, as to practice, that they are, in some fruits of it, perplexed withal, and making head against it, the sum of what they apply themselves unto? and is not the gospel end of their convictions lost thereby? Here men abide and perish.

Digitized by Google

(2.) This duty being a thing good in itself, in its proper place, a duty evidencing sincerity, bringing home peace to the conscience; a man finding himself really engaged in it, his mind and heart set against this or that sin, with purpose and resolution to have no more to do with it,—he is ready to conclude that his state and condition is good, and so to delude his own soul. For,—

[1.] When his conscience hath been made sick with sin, and he could find no rest, when he should go to the great Physician of souls, and get healing in his blood, the man by this engagement against sin pacifies and quiets his conscience, and sits down without going to Christ at all. Ah! how many poor souls are thus *deluded* to eternity! "When Ephraim saw his sickness, he sent to king Jareb," Hos. v. 13; which kept him off from God. The whole bundle of the popish religion is made up of designs and contrivances to pacify conscience without Christ; all described by the apostle, Rom. x. 3.

[2.] By this means men *satisfy* themselves that their state and condition is good, seeing they do that which is a work good in itself, and they do not do it to be seen. They know they would have the work done in sincerity, and so are hardened in a kind of self-righteousness.

(3.) When a man hath thus for a season been deluded, and hath deceived his own soul, and finds in *a long course* of life that indeed his sin is *not mortified*, or if he hath changed one he hath gotten another, he begins at length to think that all contending is in vain, —he shall never be able to prevail; he is making a dam against water that increaseth on him. Hereupon *he gives over*, as one despairing of any success, and yields up himself to the power of sin and that habit of formality that he hath gotten.

And this is the usual issue with persons attempting the mortification of sin without an interest in Christ first obtained. It *deludes* them, *hardens* them,—*destroys* them. And therefore we see that there are not usually more vile and desperate sinners in the world than such as, having by conviction been put on this course, have found it fruitless, and deserted it without a discovery of Christ. And this is the substance of the religion and godliness of the choicest formalists in the world, and of all those who in the Roman synagogue are drawn to mortification, as they drive Indians to baptism or cattle to water. I say, then, that mortification is the work of believers, and believers only. To kill sin is the work of living men; where men are *dead* (as all unbelievers, the best of them, are dead), sin is *alive*, and will live.

2. It is the work of *faith*, the *peculiar* work of faith. Now, if there be a work to be done that will be effected by one only instrument, it is the greatest madness for any to attempt the doing of it

Digitized by Google

that hath not that instrument. Now, it is faith that purifies the heart, Acts xv. 9; or, as Peter speaks, we "purify our souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit," 1 Pet. i. 22; and without it, it will not be done.

What hath been spoken I suppose is sufficient to make good my first *general rule:—Be sure to get an interest in Christ; if you intend to mortify any sin without it, it will never be done.*

Obj. You will say, "What, then, would you have unregenerate men that are convinced of the evil of sin do? Shall they cease striving against sin, live dissolutely, give their lusts their swing, and be as bad as the worst of men? This were a way to set the whole world into confusion, to bring all things into darkness, to set open the flood-gates of lust, and lay the reins upon the necks of men to rush into all sin with delight and greediness, like the horse into the battle."

Ans. 1. God forbid! It is to be looked on as a great issue of the wisdom, goodness, and love of God, that by manifold ways and means he is pleased to restrain the sons of men from running forth into that compass of excess and riot which the depravedness of their nature would carry them out unto with violence. By what way soever this is done, it is an issue of the care, kindness, and goodness of God, without which the whole earth would be a hell of sin and confusion.

2. There is a peculiar *convincing* power in the word, which God is oftentimes pleased to put forth, to the wounding, amazing, and, in some sort, humbling of sinners, though they are never converted. And the word is to be preached though it hath this end, yet not with this end. Let, then, the word be preached, and the sins of men [will be] rebuked, lust will be restrained, and some oppositions will be made against sin; though that be not the effect aimed at.

3. Though this be the *work* of the word and Spirit, and it be good in itself, yet it is not profitable nor available as to the main end in them in whom it is wrought; they are still in the gall of bitterness, and under the power of darkness.

4. Let men know it is their *duty*, but in its proper place; I take not men from mortification, but put them upon conversion. He that shall call a man from mending a hole in the wall of his house, to quench a fire that is consuming the whole building, is not his enemy. Poor soul! it is not thy sore finger but thy hectic fever that thou art to apply thyself to the consideration of. Thou settest thyself against a *particular* sin, and dost not consider that thou art *nothing* but sin.

Let me add this to them who are preachers of the word, or intend, through the good hand of God, that employment: It is their duty to plead with men about their sins, to lay load on particular sins, but always remember that it be done with that which is the proper end of law and gospel;—that is, that they make use of the sin they speak

Digitized by Google

against to the discovery of the state and condition wherein the sinner is; otherwise, haply, they may work men to formality and hypocrisy, but little of the true end of preaching the gospel will be brought about. It will not avail to beat a man off from his drunkenness into a sober formality. A skilful master of the assemblies lays his axe at the root, drives still at the heart. To inveigh against particular sins of ignorant, unregenerate persons, such as the land is full of, is a good work; but yet, though it may be done with great efficacy, vigour, and success, if this be all the effect of it, that they are set upon the most sedulous endeavours of mortifying their sins preached down, all that is done is but like the beating of an enemy in an open field, and driving him into an impregnable castle, not to be prevailed against. Get you at any time a sinner at the advantage, on the account of any one sin whatever? have you any thing to take hold of him by?—bring it to his state and condition, drive it up to the head, and there deal with him. To break men off particular sins, and not to break their hearts, is to deprive ourselves of advantages of dealing with them.

And herein is the Roman mortification grievously peccant; they drive all sorts of persons to it, without the least consideration whether they have a principle for it or no. Yea, they are so far from calling on men to believe, that they may be able to mortify their lusts, that they call men to mortification instead of believing. The truth is, they neither know what it is to *believe* nor what *mortification* itself intends. Faith with them is but a general assent to the doctrine taught in their church; and mortification the betaking of a man by a vow to some certain course of life, wherein he denies himself something of the use of the things of this world, not without a considerable compensation. Such men know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. Their boasting of their mortification is but their glorying in their shame. Some casuists among ourselves, who, overlooking the necessity of regeneration, do avowedly give this for a direction to all sorts of persons that complain of any sin or lust, that they should vow against it, at least for a season, a month or so, seem to have a scantling of light in the mystery of the gospel, much like that of Nicodemus when he came first to Christ. They bid men vow to abstain from their sin for a season. This commonly makes their lust more impetuous. Perhaps with great perplexity they keep their word; perhaps not, which increases their guilt and torment. Is their sin at all mortified hereby? Do they find a conquest over it? Is their condition changed, though they attain a relinquishment of it? Are they not still in the gall of bitterness? Is not this to put men to make brick, if not without *straw*, yet, which is worse, without *strength*? What promise hath any unregenerate man to countenance him in

Digitized by Google

this work? what assistance for the performance of it? Can sin be killed without an interest in the death of Christ, or mortified without the Spirit? If such directions should prevail to change men's lives, as seldom they do, yet they never reach to the change of their hearts or conditions. They may make men self-justiciaries or hypocrites, not Christians. It grieves me ofttimes to see poor souls, that have a zeal for God and a desire of eternal welfare, kept by such directors and directions under a hard, burdensome, outside worship and service of God, with many specious endeavours for mortification, in an utter ignorance of the righteousness of Christ, and unacquaintedness with his Spirit, all their days. Persons and things of this kind I know too many. If ever God shine into their hearts, to give them the knowledge of his glory in the face of his Son Jesus Christ, they will see the folly of their present way.

CHAPTER VIII.

The second general rule proposed—Without universal sincerity for the mortifying of every lust, no lust will be mortified—Partial mortification always from a corrupt principle—Perplexity of temptation from a lust oftentimes a chastening for other negligences.

2. THE second principle which to this purpose I shall propose is this:—

Without sincerity and diligence in a universality of obedience, there is no mortification of any one perplexing lust to be obtained.

The other was to the person; this to the thing itself. I shall a little explain this position.

A man finds any lust to bring him into the condition formerly described; it is powerful, strong, tumultuating, leads captive, vexes, disquiets, takes away peace; he is not able to bear it; wherefore he sets himself against it, prays against it, groans under it, sighs to be delivered: but in the meantime, perhaps, in other duties,—in constant communion with God,—in reading, prayer, and meditation,—in other ways that are not of the same kind with the lust wherewith he is troubled,—he is loose and negligent. Let not that man think that ever he shall arrive to the mortification of the lust he is perplexed withal. This is a condition that not seldom befalls men in their pilgrimage. The Israelites, under a sense of their sin, drew nigh to God with much diligence and earnestness, with fasting and prayer, Isa. lviii.: many expressions are made of their earnestness in the work, verse 2 "They

Digitized by Google

seek me daily, and delight to know my ways; they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God." But God rejects all. Their fast is a remedy that will not heal them, and the reason given of it, verses 5–7, is, because they were particular in this duty. They attended diligently to that, but in others were negligent and careless. He that hath a "running sore" (it is the Scripture expression) upon him, arising from an ill habit of body, contracted by intemperance and ill diet, let him apply himself with what diligence and skill he can to *the cure of his sore*, if he leave *the general habit of his body* under distempers, his labour and travail will be in vain. So will his attempts be that shall endeavour to stop a bloody issue of sin and filth in his soul, and is not equally careful of his universal spiritual temperature and constitution. For,—

(1.) This kind of endeavour for mortification proceeds from a *corrupt principle*, ground, and foundation; so that it will never proceed to a good issue. The true and acceptable principles of mortification shall be afterward insisted on. Hatred of sin as sin, not only as galling or disquieting, a sense of the love of Christ in the cross, lie at the bottom of all true spiritual mortification. Now, it is certain that that which I speak of proceeds from *self-love*. Thou settest thyself with all diligence and earnestness to mortify such a lust or sin; what is the reason of it? It disquiets thee, it hath taken away thy peace, it fills thy heart with sorrow, and trouble, and fear; thou hast no rest because of it. Yea; but, friend, thou hast neglected prayer or reading; thou hast been vain and loose in thy conversation in other things, that have not been of the same nature with that lust wherewith thou art perplexed. These are no less sins and evils than those under which thou groanest. Jesus Christ bled for them also. Why dost thou not set thyself against them also? If thou hatest sin as sin, every evil way, thou wouldst be no less watchful against every thing that grieves and disquiets the Spirit of God, than against that which grieves and disquiets thine own soul. It is evident that thou contendest against *sin* merely because of thy own *trouble* by it. Would thy conscience be quiet under it, thou wouldst let it alone. Did it not disquiet thee, it should not be disquieted by thee. Now, canst thou think that God will set in with such hypocritical endeavours,—that ever his Spirit will bear witness to the treachery and falsehood of thy spirit? Dost thou think he will ease thee of that which perplexeth thee, that thou mayst be at liberty to that which no less grieves him? No. Says God, "Here is one, if he could be rid of this lust I should never hear of him more; let him wrestle with this, or he is lost." Let not any man think to do his own work that will not do God's. God's work consists in *universal obedience;* to be freed of the present perplexity is their own only. Hence is

Digitized by Google

that of the apostle, 2 Cor. vii. 1, "Cleanse yourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." If we will do any thing, we must do all things. So, then, it is not only an intense opposition to this or that peculiar lust, but a universal humble frame and temper of heart, with watchfulness over every evil and for the performance of every duty, that is accepted.

(2.) How knowest thou but that God hath suffered the lust wherewith thou hast been perplexed to get strength in thee, and power over thee, to chasten thee for thy other negligences and common lukewarmness in walking before him; at least to awaken thee to the consideration of thy ways, that thou mayst make a thorough work and change in thy course of walking with him?

The rage and predominancy of a particular lust is commonly the fruit and issue of a careless, negligent course in general, and that upon a double account:—

[1.] As its *natural effect*, if I may so say. Lust, as I showed in general, lies in the heart of every one, even the best, whilst he lives; and think not that the Scripture speaks in vain, that it is subtle, cunning, crafty,—that it seduces, entices, fights, rebels. Whilst a man keeps a diligent watch over his heart, its root and fountain,—whilst above all keepings he keeps his heart, whence are the issues of life and death,—lust withers and dies in it. But if, through negligence, it makes an eruption any particular way, gets a passage to the thoughts by the affections, and from them and by them perhaps breaks out into open sin in the conversation, the strength of it bears that way it hath found out, and that way mainly it urgeth, until, having got a passage, it then vexes and disquiets, and is not easily to be restrained: thus, perhaps, a man may be put to wrestle all his days in sorrow with that which, by a strict and universal watch, might easily have been prevented.

[2.] As I said, God oftentimes suffers it to *chasten* our other negligences: for as with wicked men, he gives them up to *one* sin as the judgment of another, *a greater for the punishment of a less*, or one that will hold them more firmly and securely for that which they might have possibly obtained a deliverance from;[1] so even with his own, he may, he doth, leave them sometimes to some vexatious distempers, either to prevent or cure some other evil. So was the messenger of Satan let loose on Paul, that he "might not be lifted up through the abundance of spiritual revelations."[2] Was it not a correction to Peter's vain confidence, that he was left to deny his Master? Now, if this be the state and condition of lust in its prevalency, that God oftentimes suffers it so to prevail, at least to admonish us, and to humble us, perhaps to chasten and correct us for our

[1] Rom. i. 26. [2] 2 Cor. xii. 7.

Digitized by Google

general loose and careless walking, is it possible that the *effect* should be removed and the *cause* continued,—that the *particular* lust should be mortified and the *general* course be unreformed? He, then, that would really, thoroughly, and acceptably mortify any disquieting lust, let him take care to be equally diligent in all parts of obedience, and know that every lust, every omission of duty, is burdensome to God, though but one is so to him.[1] Whilst there abides a treachery in the heart to indulge to any negligence in not pressing universally to all perfection in obedience, the soul is *weak*, as not giving faith its whole work; and *selfish*, as considering more the trouble of sin than the filth and guilt of it; and lives under a constant *provocation* of God: so that it may not expect any comfortable issue in any spiritual duty that it doth undertake, much less in this under consideration, which requires another principle and frame of spirit for its accomplishment.

CHAPTER IX.

Particular directions in relation to the foregoing case proposed—FIRST. Consider the dangerous symptoms of any lust—1. Inveterateness—2. Peace obtained under it; the several ways whereby that is done—3. Frequency of success in its seductions—4. The soul's fighting against it with arguments only taken from the event—5. Its being attended with judiciary hardness—6. Its withstanding particular dealings from God—The state of persons in whom these things are found.

III. THE foregoing *general rules* being supposed, *particular directions* to the soul for its guidance under the sense of a disquieting lust or distemper, being the main thing I aim at, come next to be proposed. Now, of these some are previous and preparatory, and in some of them the work itself is contained. Of the *first sort* are these ensuing:—

FIRST. Consider what dangerous *symptoms* thy lust hath attending or accompanying it,—whether it hath any deadly mark on it or no; if it hath, *extraordinary* remedies are to be used; an ordinary course of mortification will not do it.

You will say, "What are these dangerous marks and *symptoms*, the desperate *attendancies* of an indwelling lust, that you intend?" Some of them I shall name:—

1. *Inveterateness.*—If it hath lain long corrupting in thy heart, if thou hast suffered it to abide in power and prevalency, without attempting vigorously the killing of it, and the healing of the wounds

[1] Isa. xliii. 24.

Digitized by Google

thou hast received by it, for some long season, thy distemper is dangerous. Hast thou permitted worldliness, ambition, greediness of study, to eat up other duties, the duties wherein thou oughtest to hold constant communion with God, for some long season? or uncleanness to defile thy heart with vain, and foolish, and wicked imaginations for many days? Thy lust hath a dangerous symptom. So was the case with David: Ps. xxxviii. 5, "My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness." When a lust hath lain long in the heart, corrupting, festering, cankering, it brings the soul to a woful condition. In such a case an ordinary course of humiliation will not do the work: whatever it be, it will by this means insinuate itself more or less into all the faculties of the soul, and habituate the affections to its company and society; it grows familiar to the mind and conscience, that they do not startle at it as a strange thing, but are bold with it as that which they are wonted unto; yea, it will get such advantage by this means as oftentimes to exert and put forth itself without having any notice taken of it at all, as it seems to have been with Joseph in his swearing by the life of Pharaoh. Unless some extraordinary course be taken, such a person hath no ground in the world to expect that his latter end shall be peace.

For, first, How will he be able to distinguish between the long abode of an *unmortified lust* and the *dominion of sin*, which cannot befall a regenerate person? Secondly, How can he promise himself that it shall ever be otherwise with him, or that his lust will cease tumultuating and seducing, when he sees it fixed and abiding, and hath done so for many days, and hath gone through a *variety* of conditions with him? It may be it hath tried *mercies* and *afflictions*, and those possibly so remarkable that the soul could not avoid the taking special notice of them; it may be it hath weathered out many a storm, and passed under much variety of gifts in the administration of the word; and will it prove an easy thing to dislodge an inmate pleading a title by prescription? Old neglected wounds are often mortal, always dangerous. Indwelling distempers grow rusty and stubborn by continuance in ease and quiet. Lust is such an inmate as, if it can plead time and some prescription, will not easily be ejected. As it never dies of itself, so if it be not daily killed it will always gather strength.

2. Secret pleas of the heart for the *countenancing* of itself, and keeping up its peace, notwithstanding the abiding of a lust, without a vigorous gospel attempt for its mortification, is another dangerous symptom of a deadly distemper in the heart. Now, there be several ways whereby this may be done. I shall name some of them; as,—

(1.) When upon *thoughts*, perplexing thoughts about sin, instead of applying himself to the destruction of it, a man searches his heart

Digitized by Google

to see what evidences he can find of a good condition, notwithstanding that sin and lust, so that it may go well with him.

For a man to gather up his experiences of God, to call them to mind, to collect them, consider, try, improve them, is an excellent thing,—a duty practised by all the saints, commended in the Old Testament and the New. This was David's work when he "communed with his own heart," and called to remembrance the former lovingkindness of the Lord.[1] This is the duty that Paul sets us to practise, 2 Cor. xiii. 5. And as it is in itself excellent, so it hath beauty added to it by a proper season, a time of trial or temptation, or disquietness of the heart about sin,—is a picture of silver to set off this golden apple, as Solomon speaks. But now to do it for this end, to satisfy conscience, which cries and calls for another purpose, is a desperate device of a heart in love with sin. When a man's conscience shall deal with him, when God shall rebuke him for the sinful distemper of his heart, if he, instead of applying himself to get that sin *pardoned* in the blood of Christ and *mortified* by his Spirit, shall relieve himself by any *such other evidences* as he hath, or thinks himself to have, and so disentangle himself from under the yoke that God was putting on his neck, his condition is very dangerous, his wound hardly curable. Thus the Jews, under the gallings of their own consciences and the convincing preaching of our Saviour, supported themselves with this, that they were "Abraham's children," and on that account accepted with God; and so countenanced themselves in all abominable wickedness, to their utter ruin.

This is, in some degree, a blessing of a man's self, and saying that upon one account or other he shall have peace, "although he adds drunkenness to thirst." Love of sin, undervaluation of peace and of all tastes of love from God, are inwrapped in such a frame. Such a one plainly shows, that if he can but keep up hope of escaping the "wrath to come," he can be well content to be unfruitful in the world, at any distance from God that is not final separation. What is to be expected from such a heart?

(2.) By applying *grace and mercy* to an unmortified sin, or one not *sincerely* endeavoured to be mortified, is this deceit carried on. This is a sign of a heart greatly entangled with the love of sin. When a man hath secret thoughts in his heart, not unlike those of Naaman about his worshipping in the house of Rimmon,[2] "In all other things I will walk with God, but in this thing, God be merciful unto me," his condition is sad. It is true, indeed, a resolution to this purpose, to indulge a man's self in any sin on the account of mercy, seems to be, and doubtless in any course is, altogether inconsistent with Christian sincerity, and is a badge of a hypocrite, and is

[1] Ps. lxxvii. 6–9. [2] 2 Kings v. 18.

Digitized by Google

the "turning of the grace of God into wantonness;"[1] yet I doubt not but, through the craft of Satan and their own remaining unbelief, the children of God may themselves sometimes be ensnared with this deceit of sin, or else Paul would never have so cautioned them against it as he doth, Rom. vi. 1, 2. Yea, indeed, there is nothing more natural than for fleshly reasonings to grow high and strong upon this account. The flesh would fain be indulged unto upon the account of grace, and every word that is spoken of mercy, it stands ready to catch at and to pervert it, to its own corrupt aims and purposes. To apply mercy, then, to a sin not vigorously mortified is to fulfil the end of the flesh upon the gospel.

These and many other ways and wiles a deceitful heart will sometimes make use of, to countenance itself in its abominations. Now, when a man with his sin is in this condition, that there is a secret liking of the sin prevalent in his heart, and though his will be not wholly set upon it, yet he hath an imperfect velleity towards it, he would practise it were it not for such and such considerations, and hereupon relieves himself other ways than by the mortification and pardon of it in the blood of Christ; that man's "wounds stink and are corrupt," and he will, without speedy deliverance, be at the door of death.

3. *Frequency of success* in sin's seduction, in obtaining the prevailing consent of the will unto it, is another dangerous symptom. This is that I mean: When the sin spoken of gets the consent of the will with some *delight*, though it be not actually outwardly perpetrated, yet it hath success. A man may not be able, upon outward considerations, to go along with sin to that which James calls the "finishing" of it,[2] as to the outward acts of sin, when yet the will of sinning may be actually obtained; then hath it, I say, success. Now, if any lust be able thus far to prevail in the soul of any man, as his condition may possibly be very bad and himself be unregenerate, so it cannot possibly be very good, but dangerous; and it is all one upon the matter whether this be done by the choice of the will or by inadvertency, for that inadvertency itself is in a manner chosen. When we are inadvertent and negligent, where we are bound to watchfulness and carefulness, that inadvertency doth not take off from the voluntariness of what we do thereupon; for although men do not choose and resolve to be negligent and inadvertent, yet if they choose the things that will make them so, they choose inadvertency itself as a thing may be chosen in its cause.

And let not men think that the evil of their hearts is in any measure extenuated because they seem, for the most part, to be surprised into that consent which they seem to give unto it; for it is negli-

[1] Jude 4. [2] James i. 14, 15.

Digitized by Google

gence of their duty in watching over their hearts that betrays them into that surprisal.

4. When a man fighteth against his sin only with *arguments from the issue* or the punishment due unto it, this is a sign that sin hath taken great possession of the will, and that in the heart there is a superfluity of naughtiness. Such a man as opposes nothing to the seduction of sin and lust in his heart but fear of shame among men or hell from God, is sufficiently resolved to do the sin if there were no punishment attending it; which, what it differs from living in the practice of sin, I know not. Those who are Christ's, and are acted in their obedience upon gospel principles, have the death of Christ, the love of God, the detestable nature of sin, the preciousness of communion with God, a deep-grounded abhorrency of sin *as sin*, to oppose to any seduction of sin, to all the workings, strivings, fightings of lust in their hearts. So did Joseph. "How shall I do this great evil," saith he, "and sin against the LORD?" my good and gracious God.[1] And Paul, "The love of Christ constraineth us;"[2] and, "Having received these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all pollution of the flesh and spirit," 2 Cor. vii. 1. But now if a man be so under the power of his lust that he hath nothing but law to oppose it withal, if he cannot fight against it with gospel weapons, but deals with it altogether with hell and judgment, which are the proper arms of the law, it is most evident that sin hath possessed itself of his will and affections to a very great prevalency and conquest.

Such a person hath cast off, as to the particular spoken of, the conduct of *renewing* grace, and is kept from ruin only by *restraining* grace; and so far is he fallen from grace, and returned under the power of the law. And can it be thought that this is not a great provocation to Christ, that men should cast off his easy, gentle yoke and rule, and cast themselves under the iron yoke of the law, merely out of indulgence unto their lusts?

Try thyself by this also: When thou art by sin driven to make a stand, so that thou must either serve it and rush at the command of it into folly, like the horse into the battle, or make head against it to suppress it, what dost thou say to thy soul? what dost thou expostulate with thyself? Is this all,—"Hell will be the end of this course; vengeance will meet with me and find me out?" It is time for thee to look about thee; evil lies at the door. Paul's main argument to evince that sin shall not have dominion over believers is, that they "are not under the law, but under grace," Rom. vi. 14. If thy contendings against sin be all on legal accounts, from legal principles and motives, what assurance canst thou attain unto that sin shall not have dominion over thee, which will be thy ruin?

[1] Gen. xxxix. 9. [2] 2 Cor. v. 14.

Digitized by Google

Yea, know that this reserve will not long hold out. If thy lust hath driven thee from stronger gospel forts, it will speedily prevail against this also. Do not suppose that such considerations will deliver thee, when thou hast voluntarily given up to thine enemy those helps and means of preservation which have a thousand times their strength. Rest assuredly in this, that unless thou recover thyself with speed from this condition, the thing that thou fearest will come upon thee. What *gospel principles* do not, *legal motives* cannot do.

5. When it is probable that there is, or may be, somewhat of judiciary hardness, or at least of chastening punishment, in thy lust as disquieting. This is another dangerous symptom. That God doth sometimes leave even those of his own under the perplexing power at least of some lust or sin, to correct them for former sins, negligence, and folly, I no way doubt. Hence was that complaint of the church, "Why hast thou hardened us from the fear of thy name?" Isa. lxiii. 17. That this is his way of dealing with unregenerate men no man questions. But how shall a man know whether there be any thing of God's chastening hand in his being left to the disquietment of his distemper? *Ans.* Examine thy heart and ways. What was the state and condition of thy soul before thou fellest into the entanglements of that sin which now thou so complainest of? Hadst thou been negligent in duties? Hadst thou lived inordinately to thyself? Is there the guilt of any great sin lying upon thee unrepented of? A *new sin may be permitted,* as well as a *new affliction sent,* to bring an old sin to remembrance.

Hast thou received any eminent mercy, protection, deliverance, which thou didst not improve in a due manner, nor wast thankful for? or hast thou been exercised with any affliction without labouring for the appointed end of it? or hast thou been wanting to the opportunities of glorifying God in thy generation, which, in his good providence, he had graciously afforded unto thee? or hast thou conformed thyself unto the world and the men of it, through the abounding of temptations in the days wherein thou livest? If thou findest this to have been thy state, awake, call upon God; thou art fast asleep in a storm of anger round about thee.

6. When thy lust hath already *withstood* particular dealings from God against it. This condition is described, Isa. lvii. 17, "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." God had dealt with them about their prevailing lust, and that several ways,—by affliction and desertion; but they held out against all. This is a sad condition, which nothing but *mere sovereign grace* (as God expresses it in the next verse) can relieve a man in, and which no man ought to promise himself or bear himself

Digitized by Google

upon. God oftentimes, in his providential dispensations, meets with a man, and speaks particularly to the evil of his heart, as he did to Joseph's brethren in their selling of him into Egypt. This makes the man reflect on his sin, and judge himself in particular for it. God makes it to be the voice of the danger, affliction, trouble, sickness that he is in or under. Sometimes in reading of the word God makes a man stay on something that cuts him to the heart, and shakes him as to his present condition. More frequently in the hearing of the word preached, his great ordinance for conviction, conversion, and edification, doth he meet with men. God often hews men by the sword of his word in that ordinance, strikes directly on their bosom-beloved lust, startles the sinner, makes him engage unto the mortification and relinquishment of the evil of his heart. Now, if his lust have taken such hold on him as to enforce him to break these bands of the Lord, and to cast these cords from him,—if it overcomes these convictions, and gets again into its old posture,—if it can cure the wounds it so receives,—that soul is in a sad condition.

Unspeakable are the evils which attend such a frame of heart. Every particular warning to a man in such an estate is an inestimable mercy; how then doth he despise God in them who holds out against them! And what infinite patience is this in God, that he doth not cast off such a one, and swear in his wrath that he shall never enter into his rest!

These and many other evidences are there of a lust that is dangerous, if not mortal. As our Saviour said of the evil spirit, "This kind goes not out but by fasting and prayer," so say I of lusts of this kind. An ordinary course of mortification will not do it; extraordinary ways must be fixed on.

This is the first particular direction: Consider whether the lust or sin you are contending with hath any of these dangerous symptoms attending of it.

Before I proceed I must give you one caution by the way, lest any be deceived by what hath been spoken. Whereas I say the things and evils above-mentioned may befall true believers, let not any that finds the same things in himself thence or from thence conclude that he is a true believer. These are the evils that believers may fall into and be ensnared withal, not the things that constitute a believer. A man may as well conclude that he is a believer because he is an adulterer, because David that was so fell into adultery, as conclude it from the signs foregoing; which are the evils of sin and Satan in the hearts of believers. The seventh chapter of the Romans contains the description of a regenerate man. He that shall consider what is spoken of his dark side, of his unregenerate part, of the indwelling power and violence

Digitized by Google

of sin remaining in him, and, because he finds the like in himself, conclude that he is a regenerate man, will be deceived in his reckoning. It is all one as if you should argue: A wise man may be sick and wounded, yea, do some things foolishly; therefore, every one who is sick and wounded and does things foolishly is a wise man. Or as if a silly, deformed creature, hearing one speak of a beautiful person, should say that he had a mark or a scar that much disfigured him, should conclude that because he hath himself scars, and moles, and warts, he also is beautiful. If you will have evidences of your being believers, it must be from those things that constitute men believers. He that hath these things in himself may safely conclude, "If I am a believer, I am a most miserable one." But that any man is so, he must look for other evidences if he will have peace.

CHAPTER X.

The SECOND particular direction: Get a clear sense of,—1. The guilt of the sin perplexing—Considerations for help therein proposed—2. The danger manifold—(1.) Hardening—(2.) Temporal correction—(3.) Loss of peace and strength—(4.) Eternal destruction—Rules for the management of this consideration—3. The evil of it—(1.) In grieving the Spirit—(2.) Wounding the new creature—[(3.) Taking away a man's usefulness.]

THE SECOND direction is this: *Get a clear and abiding sense upon thy mind and conscience of the guilt, danger, and evil* of that sin wherewith thou art perplexed:—

1. Of the *guilt* of it. It is one of the deceits of a prevailing lust to extenuate its own guilt. "Is it not a little one?" "When I go and bow myself in the house of Rimmon, God be merciful to me in this thing." "Though this be bad, yet it is not so bad as such and such an evil; others of the people of God have had such a frame; yea, what dreadful actual sins have some of them fallen into!" Innumerable ways there are whereby sin diverts the mind from a right and due apprehension of its guilt. Its noisome exhalations darken the mind, that it cannot make a right judgment of things. Perplexing reasonings, extenuating promises, tumultuating desires, treacherous purposes of relinquishment, hopes of mercy, all have their share in disturbing the mind in its consideration of the guilt of a prevailing lust. The prophet tells us that lust will do thus wholly when it comes to the height: Hos. iv. 11, "Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart,"—the heart, that is the understanding, as it is often used in the Scripture. And as they accomplish this work

Digitized by Google

to the height in unregenerate persons, so in part in regenerate also. Solomon tells you of him who was enticed by the lewd woman, that he was "among the simple ones;" he was "a young man void of understanding," Prov. vii. 7. And wherein did his folly appear? Why, says he, in the 23d verse, "He knew not that it was for his life;" he considered not the guilt of the evil that he was involved in. And the Lord, rendering a reason why his dealings with Ephraim took no better effect, gives this account: "Ephraim is like a silly dove without heart," Hos. vii. 11;—had no understanding of his own miserable condition. Had it been possible that David should have lain so long in the guilt of that abominable sin, but that he had innumerable corrupt reasonings, hindering him from taking a clear view of its ugliness and guilt in the glass of the law? This made the prophet that was sent for his awaking, in his dealings with him, to shut up all subterfuges and pretences by his parable, that so he might fall fully under a sense of the guilt of it. This is the proper issue of lust in the heart,—it darkens the mind that it shall not judge aright of its guilt; and many other ways it hath for its own extenuation that I shall not now insist on.

Let this, then, be the first care of him that would mortify sin,—to fix a right judgment of its guilt in his mind. To which end take these considerations to thy assistance:—

(1.) Though the power of sin be weakened by *inherent grace* in them that have it, that sin shall not have dominion over them as it hath over others, yet *the guilt of sin that doth yet abide and remain is aggravated and heightened by it:* Rom. vi. 1, 2, "What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"—"How shall we, that are dead?" The emphasis is on the word "we." How shall *we* do it, who, as he afterward describes it, have received grace from Christ to the contrary? We, doubtless, are more evil than any, if we do it. I shall not insist on the special aggravations of the sins of such persons,—how they sin against more love, mercy, grace, assistance, relief, means, and deliverances than others. But let this consideration abide in thy mind,—there is inconceivably more evil and guilt in the evil of thy heart that doth remain, than there would be in so much sin if thou hadst no grace at all. Observe,—

(2.) That as God sees abundance of beauty and excellency in the desires of the heart of his servants, more than in any the most glorious works of other men, yea, more than in most of their own outward performances, which have a greater mixture of sin than the desires and pantings of grace in the heart have; so God sees *a great deal of evil in the working of lust in their hearts, yea, and more than in the open, notorious acts of wicked men,* or in many outward sins where-

Digitized by Google

into the saints may fall, seeing against them there is more opposition made, and more humiliation generally follows them. Thus Christ, dealing with his decaying children, goes to the root with them, lays aside their profession: Rev. iii. 15, "I know thee;"—"Thou art quite another thing than thou professest; and this makes thee abominable."

So, then, let these things, and the like considerations, lead thee to a clear sense of the guilt of thy indwelling lust, that there may be no room in thy heart for extenuating or excusing thoughts, whereby sin insensibly will get strength and prevail.

2. Consider the *danger* of it, which is manifold:—

(1.) Of being *hardened by the deceitfulness.* This the apostle sorely charges on the Hebrews, chap. iii. 12, 13, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." "Take heed," saith he, "use all means, consider your temptations, watch diligently; there is a treachery, a deceit in sin, that tends to the hardening of your hearts from the fear of God." The hardening here mentioned is to the utmost,—utter obduration; sin tends to it, and every distemper and lust will make at least some progress towards it. Thou that wast tender, and didst use to melt under the word; under afflictions, wilt grow as some have profanely spoken, "sermon-proof and sickness-proof." Thou that didst tremble at the presence of God, thoughts of death, and appearance before him, when thou hadst more assurance of his love than now thou hast, shalt have a stoutness upon thy spirit not to be moved by these things. Thy soul and thy sin shall be spoken of and spoken to, and thou shalt not be at all concerned, but shalt be able to pass over duties, praying, hearing, reading, and thy heart not in the least affected. Sin will grow *a light thing* to thee; thou wilt pass it by as a thing of nought; this it will grow to. And what will be the end of such a condition? Can a sadder thing befall thee? Is it not enough to make any heart to tremble, to think of being brought into that estate wherein he should have slight thoughts of sin? Slight thoughts of grace, of mercy, of the blood of Christ, of the law, heaven, and hell, come all in at the same season. Take heed, this is that thy lust is working towards,—the hardening of the heart, searing of the conscience, blinding of the mind, stupifying of the affections, and deceiving of the whole soul.

(2.) The danger of some great *temporal correction,* which the Scripture calls "vengeance," "judgment," and "punishment." Ps. lxxxix. 30–33, Though God should not utterly cast thee off for this abomination that lies in thy heart, yet he will visit thee with the rod; though he pardon and forgive, he will take vengeance of thy inventions. O remember David and all his troubles! look on him flying into the

Digitized by Google

wilderness, and consider the hand of God upon him. Is it nothing to thee that God should kill thy child in anger, ruin thy estate in anger, break thy bones in anger, suffer thee to be a scandal and reproach in anger, kill thee, destroy thee, make thee lie down in darkness, in anger? Is it nothing that he should punish, ruin, and undo others for thy sake? Let me not be mistaken. I do not mean that God doth send all these things always on *his* in anger; God forbid! but this I say, that when he doth so deal with thee, and thy conscience bears witness with him what thy provocations have been, thou wilt find his dealings full of bitterness to thy soul. If *thou fearest* not these things, *I fear* thou art under hardness.

(3.) *Loss of peace and strength* all a man's days. To have peace with God, to have strength to walk before God, is the sum of the great promises of the covenant of grace. In these things is the life of our souls. Without them in some comfortable measure, to live is to die. What good will our lives do us if we see not the face of God sometimes in peace? if we have not some strength to walk with him? Now, both these will an unmortified lust certainly deprive the souls of men of. This case is so evident in David, as that nothing can be more clear. How often doth he complain that his bones were broken, his soul disquieted, his wounds grievous, on this account! Take other instances: Isa. lvii. 17, "For the iniquity of his covetousness I was wroth, and hid myself." What peace, I pray, is there to a soul while God hides himself, or strength whilst he smites? Hos. v. 15, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face;"—"I will leave them, hide my face, and what will become of their peace and strength?" If ever, then, thou hast enjoyed peace with God, if ever his terrors have made thee afraid, if ever thou hast had strength to walk with him, or ever hast mourned in thy prayer, and been troubled because of thy weakness, think of this danger that hangs over thy head. It is perhaps but a little while and thou shalt see the face of God in peace no more. Perhaps by to-morrow thou shalt not be able to pray, read, hear, or perform any duties with the least cheerfulness, life, or vigour; and possibly thou mayst never see a quiet hour whilst thou livest,—that thou mayst carry about thee broken bones, full of pain and terror, all the days of thy life. Yea, perhaps God will shoot his arrows at thee, and fill thee with anguish and disquietness, with fears and perplexities; make thee a terror and an astonishment to thyself and others; show thee hell and wrath every moment; frighten and scare thee with sad apprehensions of his hatred; so that thy sore shall run in the night season, and thy soul shall refuse comfort; so that thou shalt wish death rather than life, yea, thy soul may choose strangling. Consider this a little,—though God should not utterly destroy thee,

Digitized by Google

yet he might cast thee into this condition, wherein thou shalt have quick and living apprehensions of thy destruction. Wont thy heart to thoughts hereof; let it know what is like to be the issue of its state. Leave not this consideration until thou hast made thy soul to tremble within thee.

(4.) There is the danger of *eternal destruction.*

For the due management of this consideration, observe,—

[1.] That there is such a *connection* between a *continuance in sin* and *eternal destruction,* that though God does resolve to deliver some from a continuance in sin that they may not be destroyed, yet he will deliver none from destruction that continue in sin; so that whilst any one lies under an abiding power of sin, the threats of destruction and everlasting separation from God are to be held out to him. So Heb. iii. 12; to which add chap. x. 38. This is the rule of God's proceeding: If any man "depart" from him, "draw back" through unbelief, "God's soul hath no pleasure in him;"—that is, his indignation shall pursue him to destruction: so evidently, Gal. vi. 8.

[2.] That he who is *so entangled,* as above described, under the power of any corruption, can have at that present no clear prevailing evidence of his interest in the covenant, by the efficacy whereof he may be delivered from fear of destruction; so that destruction from the Lord may justly be a terror to him, and he may, he ought to look upon it, as that which will be *the end of his course and ways.* "There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus," Rom. viii. 1. True; but who shall have the comfort of this assertion? who may assume it to himself? "They that walk after the Spirit, and not after the flesh." But you will say, "Is not this to persuade men to unbelief?" I answer, No. There is a twofold judgment that a man may make of himself,—first, of his *person;* and, secondly, of his *ways.* It is the judgment of his ways, not his person, that I speak of. Let a man get the best evidence for his person that he can, yet to judge that an evil way will end in destruction is his duty; not to do it is atheism. I do not say, that in such a condition a man ought to throw away the evidences of his personal interest in Christ; but I say, he cannot keep them. There is a twofold condemnation of a man's self:—First, In respect of *desert,* when the soul concludes that it deserves to be cast out of the presence of God; and this is so far from a business of unbelief that it is an effect of faith. Secondly, With respect to the *issue and event,* when the soul concludes it shall be damned. I do not say this is the duty of any one, nor do I call them to it; but this I say, that the end of the way wherein a man is ought by him to be concluded to be death, that he may be provoked to fly from it. And this is another consideration that ought to dwell

Digitized by Google

upon such a soul, if it desire to be freed from the entanglement of its lusts.

3. Consider the *evils* of it; I mean its *present evils*. Danger respects what is to come; evil, what is present. Some of the many evils that attend an unmortified lust may be mentioned:—

(1.) It *grieves* the holy and blessed Spirit, which is given to believers to dwell in them and abide with them. So the apostle, Eph. iv. 25–29, dehorting them from many lusts and sins, gives this as the great motive of it, verse 30, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." "Grieve not that Spirit of God," saith he, "whereby you receive so many and so great benefits;" of which he instances in one signal and comprehensive one,—"sealing to the day of redemption." He is grieved by it. As a tender and loving friend is grieved at the unkindness of his friend, of whom he hath well deserved, so is it with this tender and loving Spirit, who hath chosen our hearts for a habitation to dwell in, and there to do for us all that our souls desire. He is grieved by our harbouring his enemies, and those whom he is to destroy, in our hearts with him. "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve us," Lam. iii. 33; and shall we daily grieve him? Thus is he said sometimes to be "vexed," sometimes "grieved at his heart," to express the greatest sense of our provocation. Now, if there be any thing of gracious ingenuity left in the soul, if it be not utterly hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, this consideration will certainly affect it. Consider who and what thou art; who the Spirit is that is grieved, what he hath done for thee, what he comes to thy soul about, what he hath already done in thee; and be ashamed. Among those who walk with God, there is no greater motive and incentive unto universal holiness, and the preserving of their hearts and spirits in all purity and cleanness, than this, that the blessed Spirit, who hath undertaken to dwell in them as temples of God, and to preserve them meet for him who so dwells in them, is continually considering what they give entertainment in their hearts unto, and rejoiceth when his temple is kept undefiled. That was a high aggravation of the sin of Zimri, that he brought his adulteress into the congregation in the sight of Moses and the rest, who were weeping for the sins of the people, Numb. xxv. 6. And is it not a high aggravation of the countenancing a lust, or suffering it to abide in the heart, when it is (as it must be, if we are believers) entertained under the peculiar eye and view of the Holy Ghost, taking care to preserve his tabernacle pure and holy?

(2.) The *Lord Jesus Christ is wounded afresh* by it; his new creature in the heart is wounded; his love is foiled; his adversary gratified. As a total relinquishment of him, by the deceitfulness of sin, is the "crucifying him afresh, and the putting of him to open

Digitized by Google

shame;" so every harbouring of sin that he came to destroy wounds and grieves him.

(3.) It will *take away a man's usefulness* in his generation. His works, his endeavours, his labours, seldom receive blessing from God. If he be a preacher, God commonly blows upon his ministry, that he shall labour in the fire, and not be honoured with any success or doing any work for God; and the like may be spoken of other conditions. The world is at this day full of poor withering professors. How few are there that walk in any beauty or glory! how barren, how useless are they, for the most part! Amongst the many reasons that may be assigned of this sad estate, it may justly be feared that this is none of the least effectual,—many men harbour spirit-devouring lusts in their bosoms, that lie as worms at the root of their obedience, and corrode and weaken it day by day. All graces, all the ways and means whereby any graces may be exercised and improved, are prejudiced by this means; and as to any success, God blasts such men's undertakings.

This, then, is my second direction, and it regards the opposition that is to be made to lust in respect of its habitual residence in the soul:—Keep alive upon thy heart these or the like considerations of its guilt, danger, and evil; be much in the meditation of these things; cause thy heart to dwell and abide upon them; engage thy thoughts into these considerations; let them not go off nor wander from them until they begin to have a powerful influence upon thy soul,—until they make it to tremble.

CHAPTER XI.

The THIRD direction proposed: Load thy conscience with the guilt of the perplexing distemper—The ways and means whereby that may be done—The FOURTH direction: Vehement desire for deliverance—The FIFTH: Some distempers rooted deeply in men's natural tempers—Considerations of such distempers; ways of dealing with them—The SIXTH direction: Occasions and advantages of sin to be prevented—The SEVENTH direction: The first actings of sin vigorously to be opposed.

THIS is my THIRD direction,—

Load thy conscience with the guilt of it. Not only consider that it hath a guilt, but load thy conscience with the guilt of its actual eruptions and disturbances.

For the right improvement of this rule I shall give some particular directions:—

Digitized by Google

1. Take *God's method* in it, and begin with generals, and so descend to particulars:—

(1.) Charge thy conscience with that guilt which appears in it *from the rectitude and holiness of the law.* Bring the holy law of God into thy conscience, lay thy corruption to it, pray that thou mayst be affected with it. Consider the holiness, spirituality, fiery severity, inwardness, absoluteness of the law, and see how thou canst stand before it. Be much, I say, in affecting thy conscience with the terror of the Lord in the law, and how righteous it is that every one of thy transgressions should receive a recompense of reward. Perhaps thy conscience will invent shifts and evasions to keep off the power of this consideration;—as, that the condemning power of the law doth not belong to thee, thou art set free from it, and the like; and so, though thou be not conformable to it, yet thou needest not to be so much troubled at it. But,—

[1.] Tell thy conscience that it cannot manage any evidence to the purpose that thou art free from the *condemning* power of sin, whilst thy *unmortified* lust lies in thy heart; so that, perhaps, the law may make good its plea against thee for a full dominion, and then thou art a lost creature. Wherefore it is best to ponder to the utmost what it hath to say.

Assuredly, he that pleads in the most secret reserve of his heart that he is freed from the condemning power of the law, thereby secretly to countenance himself in giving the least allowance unto any sin or lust, is not able, on gospel grounds, to manage any evidence, unto any tolerable spiritual security, that indeed he is in a due manner freed from what he so pretends himself to be delivered.

[2.] Whatever be the *issue*, yet the law hath commission from God to seize upon transgressors wherever it find them, and so bring them before his throne, where they are to plead for themselves. This is thy present case; the law hath found thee out, and before God it will bring thee. If thou canst plead a pardon, well and good; if not, the law will do its work.

[3.] However, this is the *proper work* of the law, to discover sin in the guilt of it, to awake and humble the soul for it, to be a glass to represent sin in its colours; and if thou deniest to deal with it on this account, it is not through faith, but through the hardness of thy heart and the deceitfulness of sin.

This is a door that too many professors have gone out at unto open apostasy. Such a deliverance from the law they have pretended, as that they would consult its guidance and direction no more; they would measure their sin by it no more. By little and little this principle hath insensibly, from the notion of it, proceeded to influence their practical understandings, and, having taken possession there,

Digitized by Google

hath turned the will and affections loose to all manner of abominations.

By such ways, I say, then, as these, persuade thy conscience to hearken diligently to what the law speaks, in the name of the Lord, unto thee about thy lust and corruption. Oh! if thy ears be open, it will speak with a voice that shall make thee tremble, that shall cast thee to the ground, and fill thee with astonishment. If ever thou wilt mortify thy corruptions, thou must tie up thy conscience to the law, shut it from all shifts and exceptions, until it owns its guilt with a clear and thorough apprehension; so that thence, as David speaks, thy "iniquity may ever be before thee."

(2.) Bring *thy lust to the gospel*,—not for relief, but for farther conviction of its guilt; look on Him whom thou hast pierced, and be in bitterness. Say to thy soul, "What have I done? What love, what mercy, what blood, what grace have I despised and trampled on! Is this the return I make to the Father for his *love*, to the Son for his *blood*, to the Holy Ghost for his *grace*? Do I thus requite the Lord? Have I defiled the heart that Christ died to wash, that the blessed Spirit hath chosen to dwell in? And can I keep myself out of the dust? What can I say to the dear Lord Jesus? How shall I hold up my head with any boldness before him? Do I account communion with him of so little value, that for this vile lust's sake I have scarce left him any room in my heart? How shall I escape if I neglect so great salvation? In the meantime, what shall I say to the Lord? Love, mercy, grace, goodness, peace, joy, consolation,—I have despised them all, and esteemed them as a thing of nought, that I might harbour a lust in my heart. Have I obtained a view of God's fatherly countenance, that I might behold his face and provoke him to his face? Was my soul washed, that room might be made for new defilements? Shall I endeavour to disappoint the end of the death of Christ? Shall I daily grieve that Spirit whereby I am sealed to the day of redemption?" Entertain thy conscience daily with this treaty. See if it can stand before this aggravation of its guilt. If this make it not sink in some measure and melt, I fear thy case is dangerous.

2. Descend to *particulars*. As under the general head of the gospel all the benefits of it are to be considered, as redemption, justification, and the like; so, in particular, consider the management of the love of them towards thine own soul, for the aggravation of the guilt of thy corruption. As,—

(1.) Consider *the infinite patience and forbearance* of God towards thee in particular. Consider what advantages he might have taken against thee, to have made thee a shame and a reproach in this world, and an object of wrath for ever; how thou hast dealt

Digitized by Google

treacherously and falsely with him from time to time, flattered him with thy lips, but broken all promises and engagements, and that by the means of that sin thou art now in pursuit of; and yet he hath spared thee from time to time, although thou seemest boldly to have put it to the trial how long he could hold out. And wilt thou yet sin against him? wilt thou yet weary him, and make him to serve with thy corruptions?

Hast thou not often been ready to conclude thyself, that it was utterly impossible that he should bear any longer with thee; that he would cast thee off, and be gracious no more; that all his forbearance was exhausted, and hell and wrath was even ready prepared for thee? and yet, above all thy expectation, he hath returned with visitations of love. And wilt thou yet abide in the provocation of the eyes of his glory?

(2.) How often hast thou been *at the door of being hardened* by the deceitfulness of sin, and by the infinite rich grace of God hast been recovered to communion with him again?

Hast thou not found grace decaying; delight in duties, ordinances, prayer and meditation, vanishing; inclinations to loose careless walking, thriving; and they who before were entangled, almost beyond recovery? Hast thou not found thyself engaged in such ways, societies, companies, and that with delight, as God abhors? And wilt thou venture any more to the brink of hardness?

(3.) All God's gracious dealings with thee, in providential dispensations, deliverances, afflictions, mercies, enjoyments, all ought here to take place. By these, I say, and the like means, load thy conscience; and leave it not until it be thoroughly affected with the guilt of thy indwelling corruption, until it is sensible of its wound, and lie in the dust before the Lord. Unless this be done to the purpose, all other endeavours are to no purpose. Whilst the conscience hath any means to alleviate the guilt of sin, the soul will never vigorously attempt its mortification.

FOURTHLY. Being thus affected with thy sin, in the next place get *a constant longing, breathing after deliverance from the power of it.* Suffer not thy heart one moment to be contented with thy present frame and condition. Longing desires after any thing, in things natural and civil, are of no value or consideration, any farther but as they incite and stir up the person in whom they are to a diligent use of means for the bringing about the thing aimed at. In spiritual things it is otherwise. Longing, breathing, and panting after deliverance is a grace in itself, that hath a mighty power to conform the soul into the likeness of the thing longed after. Hence the apostle, describing the repentance and godly sorrow of the Corinthians, reckons this as one eminent grace that was then set on work,

Digitized by Google

"Vehement desire," 2 Cor. vii. 11. And in this case of indwelling sin and the power of it, what frame doth he express himself to be in? Rom. vii. 24. His heart breaks out with longings into a most passionate expression of desire of deliverance. Now, if this be the frame of saints upon the general consideration of indwelling sin, how is it to be heightened and increased when thereunto is added the perplexing rage and power of any particular lust and corruption! Assure thyself, unless thou *longest* for deliverance thou shalt not have it.

This will make the heart watchful for all opportunities of advantage against its enemy, and ready to close with any assistances that are afforded for its destruction. Strong desires are the very life of that "praying always," which is enjoined us in all conditions, and in none is more necessary than in this; they set faith and hope on work, and are the soul's moving after the Lord.

Get thy heart, then, into a panting and breathing frame; long, sigh, cry out. You know the example of David; I shall not need to insist on it.

The FIFTH direction is,—

Consider whether the distemper with which thou art perplexed be not rooted in thy *nature*, and cherished, fomented, and heightened from thy *constitution*. A proneness to some sins may doubtless lie in the natural temper and disposition of men. In this case consider,—

1. This is not in the least an *extenuation* of the guilt of thy sin. Some, with an open profaneness, will ascribe gross enormities to their temper and disposition; and whether others may not relieve themselves from the pressing guilt of their distempers by the same consideration, I know not. It is from the fall, from the original depravation of our natures, that the *fomes* and nourishment of any sin abides in our natural temper. David reckons his being shapen in iniquity and conception in sin[1] as an aggravation of his following sin, not a lessening or extenuation of it. That thou art peculiarly inclined unto any sinful distemper is but a peculiar breaking out of original lust in thy nature, which should peculiarly abase and humble thee.

2. That thou hast to *fix* upon on this account, in reference to thy walking with God, is, that so great an advantage is given to sin, as also to Satan, by this thy temper and disposition, that without extraordinary watchfulness, care, and diligence, they will assuredly prevail against thy soul. Thousands have been on this account hurried headlong to hell, who otherwise, at least, might have gone at a more gentle, less provoking, less mischievous rate.

3. For the mortification of any distemper so rooted in the nature

[1] Ps. li. 5.

Digitized by Google

of a man, unto all other ways and means already named or farther to be insisted on, there is one *expedient* peculiarly suited; this is that of the apostle, 1 Cor. ix. 27, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." The bringing of the very body into subjection is an ordinance of God tending to the mortification of sin. This gives check unto the natural root of the distemper, and withers it by taking away its fatness of soil. Perhaps, because the Papists, men ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, the work of his Spirit, and whole business in hand, have laid the whole weight and stress of mortification in voluntary services and penances, leading to the subjection of the body, knowing indeed the true nature neither of sin nor mortification, it may, on the other side, be a temptation to some to neglect some means of humiliation which by God himself are owned and appointed. The bringing of the body into subjection in the case insisted on, by cutting short the natural appetite, by fasting, watching, and the like, is doubtless acceptable to God, so it be done with the ensuing limitations:—

(1.) That the outward weakening and impairing of the body be not looked upon as a thing good in itself, or that any mortification doth consist therein,—which were again to bring us under carnal ordinances; but only as a means for the end proposed,—the weakening of any distemper in its natural root and seat. A man may have leanness of body and soul together.

(2.) That the means whereby this is done,—namely, by fasting and watching, and the like,—be not looked on as things that in themselves, and by virtue of their own power, can produce true mortification of any sin; for if they would, sin might be mortified without any help of the Spirit in any unregenerate person in the world. They are to be looked on only as ways whereby the Spirit may, and sometimes doth, put forth strength for the accomplishing of his own work, especially in the case mentioned. Want of a right understanding and due improvement of these and the like considerations, hath raised a mortification among the Papists that may be better applied to horses and other beasts of the field than to believers.

This is the sum of what hath been spoken: When the distemper complained of seems to be rooted in the natural temper and constitution, in applying our souls to a participation of the blood and Spirit of Christ, an endeavour is to be used to give check in the way of God to the natural root of that distemper.

The SIXTH direction is,—

Consider what *occasions*, what *advantages* thy distemper hath taken to exert and put forth itself, and watch against them all.

This is one part of that duty which our blessed Saviour recommends to his disciples under the name of *watching:* Mark xiii. 37, "I

Digitized by Google

say unto you all, Watch;" which, in Luke xxi. 34, is, "Take heed lest your hearts be overcharged." Watch against all eruptions of thy corruptions. I mean that duty which David professed himself to be exercised unto. "I have," saith he, "kept myself from mine iniquity." He watched all the ways and workings of his iniquity, to prevent them, to rise up against them. This is that which we are called unto under the name of "considering our ways." Consider what ways, what companies, what opportunities, what studies, what businesses, what conditions, have at any time given, or do usually give, advantages to thy distempers, and set thyself heedfully against them all. Men will do this with respect unto their bodily infirmities and distempers. The seasons, the diet, the air that have proved offensive shall be avoided. Are the things of the soul of less importance? Know that he that dares to dally with occasions of sin will dare to sin. He that will venture upon temptations unto wickedness will venture upon wickedness. Hazael thought he should not be so wicked as the prophet told him he would be. To convince him, the prophet tells him no more but, "Thou shalt be king of Syria." If he will venture on temptations unto cruelty, he will be cruel. Tell a man he shall commit such and such sins, he will startle at it. If you can convince him that he will venture on such occasions and temptations of them, he will have little ground left for his confidence. Particular directions belonging to this head are many, not now to be insisted on. But because this head is of no less importance than the whole doctrine here handled, I have at large in another treatise, about entering into temptations, treated of it.

The SEVENTH direction is,—

Rise mightily against *the first actings* of thy distemper, its first conceptions; suffer it not to get the least ground. Do not say, "Thus far it shall go, and no farther." If it have allowance for one step, it will take another. It is impossible to fix bounds to sin. It is like water in a channel,—if it once break out, it will have its course. Its not acting is easier to be compassed than its bounding. Therefore doth James give that gradation and process of lust, chap. i. 14, 15, that we may stop at the entrance. Dost thou find thy corruption to begin to entangle thy thoughts? rise up with all thy strength against it, with no less indignation than if it had fully accomplished what it aims at. Consider what an unclean thought would have; it would have thee roll thyself in folly and filth. Ask *envy* what it would have;—*murder* and *destruction* is at the end of it. Set thyself against it with no less vigour than if it had utterly debased thee to wickedness. Without this course thou wilt not prevail. As sin gets ground in the affections to delight in, it gets also upon the understanding to slight it.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII.

The EIGHTH direction: Thoughtfulness of the excellency of the majesty of God—Our unacquaintedness with him proposed and considered.

EIGHTHLY, Use and exercise thyself to such meditations as may serve to fill thee at all times with *self-abasement* and thoughts of thine own vileness; as,—

1. Be much in thoughtfulness of the *excellency* of the majesty of God and thine infinite, inconceivable distance from him. Many thoughts of it cannot but fill thee with a sense of thine own vileness, which strikes deep at the root of any indwelling sin. When Job comes to a clear discovery of the greatness and the excellency of God, he is filled with self-abhorrence and is pressed to humiliation, Job xlii. 5, 6. And in what state doth the prophet Habakkuk affirm himself to be cast, upon the apprehension of the majesty of God? chap. iii. 16. "With God," says Job, "is terrible majesty."[1] Hence were the thoughts of them of old, that when they had seen God they should die. The Scripture abounds in this self-abasing consideration, comparing the men of the earth to "grasshoppers," to "vanity," the "dust of the balance," in respect of God.[2] Be much in thoughts of this nature, to abase the pride of thy heart, and to keep thy soul humble within thee. There is nothing will render thee a greater indisposition to be imposed on by the deceits of sin than such a frame of heart. Think greatly of the greatness of God.

2. Think much of thine *unacquaintedness* with him. Though thou knowest enough to keep thee low and humble, yet how little a portion is it that thou knowest of him! The contemplation hereof cast that wise man into that apprehension of himself which he expresses, Prov. xxx. 2–4, "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy. Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his Son's name, if thou canst tell?" Labour with this also to take down the pride of thy heart. What dost thou know of God? How little a portion is it! How immense is he in his nature! Canst thou look without terror into the abyss of eternity? Thou canst not bear the rays of his glorious being.

Because I look on this consideration of great use in our walking with God, so far as it may have a consistency with that filial bold-

[1] Job xxxvii. 22. [2] Isa. xl. 12–25.

Digitized by Google

ness which is given us in Jesus Christ to draw nigh to the throne of grace, I shall farther insist upon it, to give an abiding impression of it to the souls of them who desire to walk humbly with God.

Consider, then, I say, to keep thy heart in continual awe of the majesty of God, that persons of the most high and eminent attainment, of the nearest and most familiar communion with God, do yet in this life know but a very little of him and his glory. God reveals his name to Moses,—the most glorious attributes that he hath manifested in the covenant of grace, Exod. xxxiv. 5, 6; yet all are but the "back parts" of God. All that he knows by it is but little, low, compared to the perfections of his glory. Hence it is with peculiar reference to Moses that it is said, "No man hath seen God at any time," John i. 18; of him in comparison with Christ doth he speak, verse 17; and of him it is here said, "No man," no, not Moses, the most eminent among them, "hath seen God at any time." We speak much of God, can talk of him, his ways, his works, his counsels, all the day long; the truth is, we know very little of him. Our thoughts, our meditations, our expressions of him are low, many of them unworthy of his glory, none of them reaching his perfections.

You will say that Moses was under the law when God wrapped up himself in darkness, and his mind in types and clouds and dark institutions;—under the glorious shining of the gospel, which hath brought life and immortality to light, God being revealed from his own bosom, we now know him much more clearly, and as he is; we see his *face* now, and not his *back parts* only, as Moses did.

Ans. 1 I acknowledge a vast and almost inconceivable difference between the acquaintance we now have with God, after his speaking to us by his own Son,[1] and that which the generality of the saints had under the law; for although their eyes were as good, sharp, and clear as ours, their faith and spiritual understanding not behind ours, the object as glorious unto them as unto us, yet our day is more clear than theirs was, the clouds are blown away and scattered,[2] the shadows of the night are gone and fled away, the sun is risen, and the means of sight is made more eminent and clear than formerly. Yet,—

2. That peculiar sight which Moses had of God, Exod. xxxiv., was a *gospel-sight*, a sight of God as "gracious," etc., and yet it is called but his "back parts;" that is, but low and mean, in comparison of his excellencies and perfections.

3. The apostle, exalting to the utmost this glory of light above that of the law, manifesting that now the "vail" causing darkness is taken away, so that with "open" or uncovered "face[3] we behold the glory of the Lord," tells us how: "As in a glass," 2 Cor iii. 18. "In a

[1] Heb. i. 2. [2] Cant. iv. 6. [3] Ἀνακεκαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ.

Digitized by Google

glass," how is that? Clearly, perfectly? Alas, no! He tells you how that is, 1 Cor. xiii. 12, "We see through a glass, darkly," saith he. It is not a telescope that helps us to see things afar off, concerning which the apostle speaks; and yet what poor helps are they! how short do we come of the truth of things notwithstanding their assistance! It is a looking-glass whereunto he alludes (where are only obscure species and images of things, and not the things themselves), and a sight therein that he compares our knowledge to. He tells you also that all that we do see, δι' ἐσόπτρου, "by" or "through this glass," is in αἰνίγματι,—in "a riddle," in darkness and obscurity. And speaking of himself, who surely was much more clear-sighted than any now living, he tells us that he saw but ἐκ μέρους,—"in part." He saw but the back parts of heavenly things, verse 12, and compares all the knowledge he had attained of God to that he had of things when he was a child, verse 11. It is a μέρος, short of the τὸ τέλειον yea, such as καταργηθήσεται,—"it shall be destroyed," or done away. We know what weak, feeble, uncertain notions and apprehensions children have of things of any abstruse consideration; how when they grow up with any improvements of parts and abilities, those conceptions vanish, and they are ashamed of them. It is the commendation of a child to love, honour, believe, and obey his father; but for his science and notions, his father knows his childishness and folly. Notwithstanding all our confidence of high attainments, all our notions of God are but childish in respect of his infinite perfections. We lisp and babble, and say we know not what, for the most part, in our most accurate, as we think, conceptions and notions of God. We may love, honour, believe, and obey our Father; and therewith he accepts our childish thoughts, for they are but childish. We see but his back parts; we know but little of him. Hence is that promise wherewith we are so often supported and comforted in our distress, "We shall see him as he is;" we shall see him "face to face;" "know as we are known; comprehend that for which we are comprehended," 1 Cor. xiii. 12, 1 John iii. 2; and positively, "Now we see him not;" —all concluding that here we see but his back parts; not as he is, but in a dark, obscure representation; not in the perfection of his glory.

The queen of Sheba had heard much of Solomon, and framed many great thoughts of his magnificence in her mind thereupon; but when she came and saw his glory, she was forced to confess that the one half of the truth had not been told her. We may suppose that we have here attained great knowledge, clear and high thoughts of God; but, alas! when he shall bring us into his presence we shall cry out, "We never knew him as he is; the thousandth part of his glory, and perfection, and blessedness, never entered into our hearts."

Digitized by Google

The apostle tells us, 1 John iii. 2, that we know not what we ourselves shall be,—what we shall find ourselves in the issue; much less will it enter into our hearts to conceive what God is, and what we shall find him to be. Consider either him who is to be known, or the way whereby we know him, and this will farther appear:—

(1.) We know so little of *God*, because it is *God* who is thus to be known,—that is, he who hath described himself to us very much by this, that we *cannot* know him. What else doth he intend where he calls himself invisible, incomprehensible, and the like?—that is, he whom we do not, cannot, know as he is. And our farther progress consists more in knowing what he is not, than what he is. Thus is he described to be immortal, infinite,—that is, he is not, as we are, mortal, finite, and limited. Hence is that glorious description of him, 1 Tim. vi. 16, "Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see." His light is such as no creature can approach unto. He is not seen, not because he cannot be seen, but because we cannot bear the sight of him. The light of God, in whom is no darkness, forbids all access to him by any creature whatever. We who cannot behold the sun in its glory are too weak to bear the beams of infinite brightness. On this consideration, as was said, the wise man professeth himself "a very beast, and not to have the understanding of a man," Prov. xxx. 2;—that is, he knew nothing in comparison of God; so that he seemed to have lost all his understanding when once he came to the consideration of him, his work, and his ways.

In this consideration let our souls descend to some particulars:—

[1.] For the *being* of God; we are so far from a knowledge of it, so as to be able to instruct one another therein by words and expressions of it, as that to frame any conceptions in our mind, with such species and impressions of things as we receive the knowledge of all other things by, is to make an idol to ourselves, and so to worship a god of our own making, and not the God that made us. We may as well and as lawfully hew him out of wood or stone as form him a being in our minds, suited to our apprehensions. The utmost of the best of our thoughts of the being of God is, that we can have no thoughts of it. Our knowledge of a being is but low when it mounts no higher but only to know that we know it not.

[2.] There be *some* things of God which he himself hath taught us to speak of, and to regulate our expressions of them; but when we have so done, we see not the things themselves; we know them not. To *believe* and *admire* is all that we attain to. We profess, as we are taught, that God is infinite, omnipotent, eternal; and we know what disputes and notions there are about omnipresence, immensity, infiniteness, and eternity. We have, I say, words and notions about

Digitized by Google

these things; but as to the things themselves what do we know? what do we comprehend of them? Can the mind of man do any more but swallow itself up in an infinite abyss, which is as nothing; give itself up to what it cannot conceive, much less express? Is not our understanding "brutish" in the contemplation of such things, and is as if it were not? Yea, the perfection of our understanding is, not to understand, and to rest there. They are but the back parts of eternity and infiniteness that we have a glimpse of. What shall I say of the Trinity, or the subsistence of distinct persons in the same individual essence,—a mystery by many denied, because by none understood,—a mystery, whose every letter is mysterious? Who can declare the generation of the Son, the procession of the Spirit, or the difference of the one from the other? But I shall not farther instance in particulars. That infinite and inconceivable distance that is between him and us keeps us in the dark as to any sight of his face or clear apprehension of his perfections.

We know him rather by what he does than by what he is,—by his doing us good than by his essential goodness; and how little a portion of him, as Job speaks, is hereby discovered!

(2.) We know little of God, because it is *faith* alone whereby here we know him. I shall not now discourse about the remaining impressions on the hearts of all men by nature that there is a God, nor what they may rationally be taught concerning that God from the works of his creation and providence, which they see and behold. It is confessedly, and that upon the woful experience of all ages, so weak, low, dark, confused, that none ever on that account glorified God as they ought, but, notwithstanding all their knowledge of God, were indeed "without God in the world."

The chief, and, upon the matter, almost only acquaintance we have with God, and his dispensations of himself, is by faith. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," Heb. xi. 6. Our knowledge of him and his rewarding (the bottom of our obedience or coming to him), is believing. "We walk by faith, and not by sight," 2 Cor. v. 7;—Διὰ πίστεως οὐ διὰ εἴδους· by faith, and so by faith as not to have any express idea, image, or species of that which we believe. Faith is all the argument we have of "things not seen," Heb. xi. 1. I might here insist upon the nature of it; and from all its concomitants and concernments manifest that we know but the back parts of what we know by faith only. As to its rise, it is built purely upon the testimony of Him whom we have not seen: as the apostle speaks, "How can ye love him whom ye have not seen?"—that is, whom you know not but by faith that he is. Faith receives all upon *his* testimony, whom it receives to be only on his own testimony. As to its nature, it is an assent upon testi-

Digitized by Google

mony, not an evidence upon demonstration; and the object of it is, as was said before, above us. Hence our faith, as was formerly observed, is called a "seeing darkly, as in a glass." All that we know this way (and all that we know of God we know this way) is but low, and dark, and obscure.

But you will say, "All this is true, but yet it is only so to them that know not God, perhaps, as he is revealed in Jesus Christ; with them who do so it is otherwise. It is true, 'No man hath seen God at any time,' but 'the only-begotten Son, he hath revealed him,' John i. 18; and 'the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true,' 1 John v. 20. The illumination of 'the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God,' shineth upon believers, 2 Cor. iv. 4; yea, and 'God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, shines into their hearts, to give them the knowledge of his glory in the face of his Son,' verse 6. So that 'though we were darkness,' yet we are now 'light in the Lord,' Eph. v. 8. And the apostle says, 'We all with open face behold the glory of the Lord,' 2 Cor. iii. 18; and we are now so far from being in such darkness, or at such a distance from God, that 'our communion and fellowship is with the Father and with his Son,' 1 John i. 3. The light of the gospel whereby now God is revealed is glorious; not a star, but the sun in his beauty is risen upon us, and the vail is taken from our faces. So that though unbelievers, yea, and perhaps some weak believers, may be in some darkness, yet those of any growth or considerable attainments have a clear sight and view of the face of God in Jesus Christ."

To which I answer,—

[1.] The truth is, we all of us know *enough* of him to love him more than we do, to delight in him and serve him, believe him, obey him, put our trust in him, above all that we have hitherto attained. Our darkness and weakness is no plea for our negligence and disobedience. Who is it that hath walked up to the knowledge that he hath had of the perfections, excellencies, and will of God? God's end in giving us any knowledge of himself here is that we may "glorify him as God;" that is, love him, serve him, believe and obey him,—give him all the honour and glory that is due from poor sinful creatures to a sin-pardoning God and Creator. We must all acknowledge that we were never thoroughly transformed into the image of that knowledge which we have had. And had we used our talents well, we might have been trusted with more.

[2.] *Comparatively*, that knowledge which we have of God by the revelation of Jesus Christ in the gospel is exceeding eminent and glorious. It is so in comparison of any knowledge of God that might otherwise be attained, or was delivered in the law under the Old Tes-

Digitized by Google

tament, which had but the shadow of good things, not the express image of them; this the apostle pursues at large, 2 Cor. iii. Christ hath now in these last days revealed the Father from his own bosom, declared his name, made known his mind, will, and counsel in a far more clear, eminent, distinct manner than he did formerly, whilst he kept his people under the pedagogy of the law; and this is that which, for the most part, is intended in the places before mentioned. The clear, perspicuous delivery and declaration of God and his will in the gospel is expressly exalted in comparison of any other way of revelation of himself.

[3.] The difference between believers and unbelievers as to knowledge is not so much in the *matter of their knowledge* as in *the manner of knowing*. Unbelievers, some of them, may know more and be able to say more of God, his perfections, and his will, than many believers; but they know nothing as they ought, nothing in a right manner, nothing spiritually and savingly, nothing with a holy, heavenly light. The excellency of a believer is, not that he hath a large apprehension of things, but that what he doth apprehend, which perhaps may be very little, he sees it in the light of the Spirit of God, in a saving, soul-transforming light; and this is that which gives us communion with God, and not prying thoughts or curious-raised notions.

[4.] Jesus Christ by his word and Spirit reveals to the hearts of all his, God as a Father, as a God in covenant, as a rewarder, every way sufficiently to teach us to obey him here, and to lead us to his bosom, to lie down there in the fruition of him to eternity. But yet now,

[5.] Notwithstanding all this, it is but a *little portion* we know of him; we see but his back parts. For,—

1*st*. The intendment of all gospel revelation is, not to *unvail God's essential glory*, that we should see him as he is, but merely to declare so much of him as he knows sufficient to be a bottom of our faith, love, obedience, and coming to him,—that is, of the faith which here he expects from us; such services as beseem poor creatures in the midst of temptations. But when he calls us to eternal admiration and contemplation, without interruption, he will make a new manner of discovery of himself, and the whole shape of things, as it now lies before us, will depart as a shadow.

2*dly*. We are dull and slow of heart to receive the things that are in the word revealed; God, by our infirmity and weakness, keeping us in continual dependence on him for teachings and revelations of himself out of his word, never in this world bringing any soul to the utmost of what is from the word to be made out and discovered: so that although the way of revelation in the gospel be clear and evident, yet we know little of the things themselves that are revealed.

Digitized by Google

Let us, then, revive the use and intendment of this consideration: Will not a due apprehension of this inconceivable greatness of God, and that infinite distance wherein we stand from him, fill the soul with a holy and awful fear of him, so as to keep it in a frame unsuited to the thriving or flourishing of any lust whatever? Let the soul be continually wonted to reverential thoughts of God's greatness and omnipresence, and it will be much upon its watch as to any undue deportments. Consider him with whom you have to do, —even "our God is a consuming fire;" and in your greatest abashments at his presence and eye, know that your very nature is too narrow to bear apprehensions suitable to his essential glory.

CHAPTER XIII.

The NINTH direction: When the heart is disquieted by sin, speak no peace to it until God speak it—Peace, without detestation of sin, unsound; so is peace measured out unto ourselves—How we may know when we measure our peace unto ourselves—Directions as to that inquiry—The vanity of speaking peace slightly; also of doing it on one singular account, not universally.

NINTHLY, In case God disquiet the heart about the guilt of its distempers, either in respect of its root and indwelling, or in respect of any eruptions of it, *take heed thou speakest not peace to thyself before God speaks it; but hearken what he says to thy soul.* This is our next direction, without the observation whereof the heart will be exceedingly exposed to the deceitfulness of sin.

This is a business of great importance. It is a sad thing for a man to deceive his own soul herein. All the warnings God gives us, in tenderness to our souls, to try and examine ourselves, do tend to the preventing of this great evil of speaking peace groundlessly to ourselves; which is upon the issue to bless ourselves, in an opposition to God. It is not my business to insist upon the danger of it, but to help believers to prevent it, and to let them know when they do so.

To manage this direction aright observe,—

1. That as it is the great *prerogative and sovereignty* of God to give grace to whom he pleases ("He hath mercy on whom he will," Rom. ix. 18; and among all the sons of men, he calls whom he will, and sanctifies whom he will), so among those so called and justified, and whom he will save, he yet reserves this privilege to himself, to speak peace to whom he pleaseth, and in what degree he pleaseth, even amongst them on whom he hath bestowed grace. He is the

Digitized by Google

"God of all consolation," in an especial manner in his dealing with believers; that is, of the good things that he keeps locked up in his family, and gives out of it to all his children at his pleasure. This the Lord insists on, Isa. lvii. 16–18. It is the case under consideration that is there insisted on. When God says he will heal their breaches and disconsolations, he assumes this privilege to himself in an especial manner: "I create it," verse 19;—"Even in respect of these poor wounded creatures I create it, and according to my sovereignty make it out as I please."

Hence, as it is with *the collation of grace* in reference to them that are in the state of nature,—God doth it in great curiosity, and his proceedings therein in taking and leaving, as to outward appearances, quite besides and contrary ofttimes to all probable expectations; so is it in his *communications* of peace and joy in reference unto them that are in the state of grace,—he gives them out ofttimes quite besides our expectation, as to any appearing grounds of his dispensations.

2. As God *creates it for whom he pleaseth*, so it is the prerogative of Christ to speak it home to the conscience. Speaking to the church of Laodicea, who had healed her wounds falsely, and spoke peace to herself when she ought not, he takes to himself that title, "I am the Amen, the faithful Witness," Rev. iii. 14. He bears testimony concerning our condition as it is indeed. We may possibly mistake, and trouble ourselves in vain, or flatter ourselves upon false grounds, but he is the "Amen, the faithful Witness;" and what he speaks of our state and condition, that it is indeed. Isa. xi. 3, He is said not to "judge after the sight of his eyes,"—not according to any outward appearance, or any thing that may be subject to a mistake, as we are apt to do; but he shall judge and determine every cause as it is indeed.

Take these two previous observations, and I shall give some rules whereby men may know whether God speaks peace to them, or whether they speak peace to themselves only:—

1. Men certainly speak peace to themselves when their so doing is *not attended with the greatest detestation* imaginable of that sin in reference whereunto they do speak peace to themselves, and abhorrency of themselves for it. When men are wounded by sin, disquieted and perplexed, and knowing that there is no remedy for them but only in the mercies of God, through the blood of Christ, do therefore look to him, and to the promises of the covenant in him, and thereupon quiet their hearts that it shall be well with them, and that God will be exalted, that he may be gracious to them, and yet their souls are not wrought to the greatest detestation of the sin or sins upon the account whereof they are disquieted,—this is to heal them-

Digitized by Google

selves, and not to be healed of God. This is but a great and strong wind, that the Lord is nigh unto, but the Lord is not in the wind. When men do truly "look upon Christ whom they have pierced," without which there is no healing or peace, they will "mourn," Zech. xii. 10; they will mourn for him, even upon this account, and detest the sin that pierced him. When we go to Christ for healing, faith eyes him peculiarly as one pierced. Faith takes several views of Christ, according to the occasions of address to him and communion with him that it hath. Sometimes it views his holiness, sometimes his power, sometimes his love, [sometimes] his favour with his Father. And when it goes for healing and peace, it looks especially on the blood of the covenant, on his sufferings; for "with his stripes we are healed, and the chastisement of our peace was upon him," Isa. liii. 5. When we look for healing, his stripes are to be eyed,—not in the outward story of them, which is the course of popish devotionists, but in the love, kindness, mystery, and design of the cross; and when we look for peace, his chastisements must be in our eye. Now this, I say, if it be done according to the mind of God, and in the strength of that Spirit which is poured out on believers, it will beget a detestation of that sin or sins for which healing and peace is sought. So Ezek. xvi. 60, 61, "Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant." And what then? "Then thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed." When God comes home to speak peace in a sure covenant of it, it fills the soul with shame for all the ways whereby it hath been alienated from him. And one of the things that the apostle mentions as attending that godly sorrow which is accompanied with repentance unto salvation, never to be repented of, is revenge: "Yea, what revenge!" 2 Cor. vii. 11. They reflected on their miscarriages with indignation and revenge, for their folly in them. When Job comes up to a thorough healing, he cries, "Now I abhor myself," Job xlii. 6; and until he did so, he had no abiding peace. He might perhaps have made up himself with that doctrine of free grace which was so excellently preached by Elihu, chap. xxxiii. from verse 14 unto 30; but he had then but skinned his wounds: he must come to self-abhorrency if he come to healing. So was it with those in Ps. lxxviii. 33–35, in their great trouble and perplexity, for and upon the account of sin. I doubt not but upon the address they made to God in Christ (for that so they did is evident from the titles they gave him; they call him their Rock and their Redeemer, two words everywhere pointing out the Lord Christ), they spake peace to themselves; but was it sound and abiding? No; it passed away as the early dew. God speaks not one word of peace to their souls. But why had they not peace? Why, because in their address to God, they flattered him.

Digitized by Google

But how doth that appear? Verse 37: "Their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast;" they had not a detestation nor relinquishment of that sin in reference whereunto they spake peace to themselves. Let a man make what application he will for healing and peace, let him do it to the true Physician, let him do it the right way, let him quiet his heart in the promises of the covenant; yet, when peace is spoken, if it be not attended with the detestation and abhorrency of that sin which was the wound and caused the disquietment, this is no peace of *God's creating*, but of *our own purchasing*. It is but a skinning over the wound, whilst the core lies at the bottom, which will putrefy, and corrupt, and corrode, until it break out again with noisomeness, vexation, and danger. Let not poor souls that walk in such a path as this, who are more sensible of the trouble of sin than of the pollution of uncleanness that attends it; who address themselves for mercy, yea, to the Lord in Christ they address themselves for mercy, but yet will keep the sweet morsel of their sin under their tongue;—let them, I say, never think to have true and solid peace. For instance, thou findest thy heart running out after the world, and it disturbs thee in thy communion with God; the Spirit speaks expressly to thee,—"He that loveth the world, the love of the Father is not in him."[1] This puts thee on dealing with God in Christ for the healing of thy soul, the quieting of thy conscience; but yet, withal, a thorough detestation of the evil itself abides not upon thee; yea, perhaps that is liked well enough, but only in respect of the consequences of it. Perhaps thou mayst be saved, yet as through fire, and God will have some work with thee before he hath done; but thou wilt have little peace in this life,—thou wilt be sick and fainting all thy days, Isa. lvii. 17. This is a deceit that lies at the root of the peace of many professors and wastes it. They deal with all their strength about mercy and pardon, and seem to have great communion with God in their so doing; they lie before him, bewail their sins and follies, that any one would think, yea, they think themselves, that surely they and their sins are now parted; and so receive in mercy that satisfies their hearts for a little season. But when a thorough search comes to be made, there hath been some secret reserve for the folly or follies treated about,—at least, there hath not been that thorough abhorrency of it which is necessary; and their whole peace is quickly discovered to be weak and rotten, scarce abiding any longer than the words of begging it are in their mouths.

2. When men measure out peace to themselves upon the conclusions that their *convictions and rational principles* will carry them out unto, this is a false peace, and will not abide. I shall a little explain what I mean hereby. A man hath got a wound by sin; he hath a

[1] 1 John ii. 15.

Digitized by Google

conviction of some sin upon his conscience; he hath not walked uprightly as becometh the gospel; all is not well and right between God and his soul. He considers now what is to be done. Light he hath, and knows what path he must take, and how his soul hath been formerly healed. Considering that the promises of God are the outward means of application for the healing of his sores and quieting of his heart, he goes to them, searches them out, finds out some one or more of them whose literal expressions are directly suited to his condition. Says he to himself, "God speaks in this promise; here I will take myself a plaster as long and broad as my wound;" and so brings the word of the promise to his condition, and sets him down in peace. This is another appearance upon the mount; the Lord is near, but the Lord is not in it. It hath not been the work of the Spirit, who alone can "convince us of sin, and righteousness, and judgment,"[1] but the mere actings of the intelligent, rational soul. As there are three sorts of lives, we say,—the vegetative, the sensitive, and the rational or intelligent,—some things have only the vegetative; some the sensitive also, and that includes the former; some have the rational, which takes in and supposes both the other. Now, he that hath the rational doth not only act suitably to that principle, but also to both the others,—he grows and is sensible. It is so with men in the things of God. Some are mere *natural* and rational men; some have a *superadded* conviction with illumination; and some are truly *regenerate*. Now, he that hath the latter hath also both the former; and therefore he acts sometimes upon the principles of the rational, sometimes upon the principles of the enlightened man. His true spiritual life is not the principle of all his motions; he acts not always in the strength thereof, neither are all his fruits from that root. In this case that I speak of, he acts merely upon the principle of conviction and illumination, whereby his first naturals are heightened; but the Spirit breathes not at all upon all these waters. Take an instance: Suppose the wound and disquiet of the soul to be upon the account of relapses,—which, whatever the evil or folly be, though for the matter of it never so small, yet there are no wounds deeper than those that are given the soul on that account, nor disquietments greater;—in the perturbation of his mind, he finds out that promise, Isa. lv. 7, "The LORD will have mercy, and our God will abundantly pardon,"—he will multiply or add to pardon, he will do it again and again; or that in Hos. xiv. 4, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely." This the man considers, and thereupon concludes peace to himself; whether the Spirit of God make the application or no, whether that gives life and power to the letter or no, that he regards not. He doth not hearken

[1] John xvi. 8.

Digitized by Google

whether God the Lord speak peace. He doth not wait upon God, who perhaps yet hides his face, and sees the poor creature stealing peace and running away with it, knowing that the time will come when he will deal with him again, and call him to a new reckoning;[1] when he shall see that it is in vain to go one step where God doth not take him by the hand.

I see here, indeed, sundry other questions upon this arising and interposing themselves. I cannot apply myself to them all: one I shall a little speak to.

It may be said, then, "Seeing that this seems to be the path that the Holy Spirit leads us in for the healing of our wounds and quieting of our hearts, how shall we know when we go alone ourselves, and when the Spirit also doth accompany us?"

Ans. (1.) If any of you are out of the way upon this account, God will speedily let you know it; for besides that you have his promise, that the "meek he will guide in judgment and teach them his way," Ps. xxv. 9, he will not let you always err. He will, I say, not suffer your nakedness to be covered with fig-leaves, but take them away and all the peace you have in them, and will not suffer you to settle on such lees. You shall quickly know your wound is not healed; that is, you shall speedily know whether or no it be thus with you by the event. The peace you thus get and obtain will not abide. Whilst the mind is overpowered by its own convictions, there is no hold for disquietments to fix upon. Stay a little, and all these reasonings will grow cold and vanish before the face of the first temptation that arises. But,—

(2.) This course is commonly taken without *waiting;* which is the grace, and that peculiar acting of faith which God calls for, to be exercised in such a condition. I know God doth sometimes come in upon the soul instantly, in a moment, as it were, wounding and healing it,—as I am persuaded it was in the case of David, when he cut off the lap of Saul's garment; but ordinarily, in such a case, God calls for [2]waiting and labouring, attending as the eye of a servant upon his master. Says the prophet Isaiah, chap. viii. 17, "I will wait upon the LORD, who hideth his face from the house of Jacob." God will have his children lie a while at his door when they have run from his house, and not instantly rush in upon him; unless he take them by the hand and pluck them in, when they are so ashamed that they dare not come to him. Now, self-healers, or men that speak peace to themselves, do commonly make haste; they will not tarry; they do not hearken what God speaks, but on they will go to be healed.[3]

(3.) Such a course, though it may quiet the conscience and the mind, the rational concluding part of the soul, yet it doth not *sweeten*

[1] Hos. ix. 9. [2] Ps. cxxx. 6, cxxiii. 2. [3] Isa. xxviii. 16.

Digitized by Google

the heart with rest and gracious contentation. The answer it receives is much like that Elisha gave Naaman, "Go in peace;"[1] it quieted his mind, but I much question whether it sweetened his heart, or gave him any joy in believing, other than the natural joy that was then stirred in him upon his healing. "Do not my words do good?" saith the Lord, Micah ii. 7. When God speaks, there is not only truth in his words, that may answer the conviction of our understandings, but also they do good; they bring that which is sweet, and good, and desirable to the will and affections; by them the "soul returns unto its rest," Ps. cxvi. 7.

(4.) Which is worst of all, it *amends not the life*, it heals not the evil, it cures not the distemper. When God speaks peace, it guides and keeps the soul that it "turn not again to folly."[2] When we speak it ourselves, the heart is not taken off the evil; nay, it is the readiest course in the world to bring a soul into a trade of backsliding. If, upon thy plastering thyself, thou findest thyself rather animated to the battle again than utterly weaned from it, it is too palpable that thou hast been at work with thine own soul, but Jesus Christ and his Spirit were not there. Yea, and oftentimes nature having done its work, will, ere a few days are over, come for its reward; and, having been active in the work of healing, will be ready to reason for a new wounding. In God's speaking peace there comes along so much sweetness, and such a discovery of his love, as is a strong obligation on the soul no more to deal perversely.[3]

3. We speak peace to ourselves when we do it *slightly*. This the prophet complains of in some teachers: Jer. vi. 14, "They have healed the wound of the daughter of my people slightly." And it is so with some persons: they make the healing of their wounds a slight work; a look, a glance of faith to the promises does it, and so the matter is ended. The apostle tells us that "the word did not profit" some, because "it was not mixed with faith," Heb. iv. 2,—μὴ συγκεκραμένος· "it was not well tempered" and mingled with faith. It is not a mere look to the word of mercy in the promise, but it must be mingled with faith until it is incorporated into the very nature of it; and then, indeed, it doth good unto the soul. If thou hast had a wound upon thy conscience, which was attended with weakness and disquietness, which now thou art freed of, how camest thou so? "I looked to the promises of pardon and healing, and so found peace." Yea, but perhaps thou hast made too much haste, thou hast done it overtly, thou hast not fed upon the promise so as to mix it with faith, to have got all the virtue of it diffused into thy soul; only thou hast done it slightly. Thou wilt find thy wound, ere it be long, breaking out again; and thou shalt know that thou art not cured.

[1] 2 Kings v. 19. [2] Ps. lxxxv. 8. [3] Luke xxii. 32.

Digitized by Google

4. Whoever speaks peace to himself upon any one account, and at the same time hath another evil of *no less importance* lying upon his spirit, about which he hath had no dealing with God, that man cries "Peace" when there is none. A little to explain my meaning: A man hath neglected a duty again and again, perhaps, when in all righteousness it was due from him; his conscience is perplexed, his soul wounded, he hath no quiet in his bones by reason of his sin; he applies himself for healing, and finds peace. Yet, in the meantime, perhaps, worldliness, or pride, or some other folly, wherewith the Spirit of God is exceedingly grieved, may lie in the bosom of that man, and they neither disturb him nor he them. Let not that man think that any of his peace is from God. Then shall it be well with men, when they have an equal respect to all God's commandments. God will justify us *from* our sins, but he will not justify the least sin *in* us: "He is a God of purer eyes than to behold iniquity."

5. When men of themselves speak peace to their consciences, it is seldom that God speaks *humiliation* to their souls. God's peace is humbling peace, melting peace, as it was in the case of David;[1] never such deep humiliation as when Nathan brought him the tidings of his pardon.

But you will say, "When may we take the comfort of a promise as our own, in relation to some peculiar wound, for the quieting the heart?"

First, In general, when God speaks it, be it when it will, sooner or later. I told you before, he may do it in the very instant of the sin itself, and that with such irresistible power that the soul must needs receive his mind in it; sometimes he will make us wait longer: but when he speaks, be it sooner or later, be it when we are sinning or repenting, be the condition of our souls what they please, if God speak, he must be received. There is not any thing that, in our communion with him, the Lord is more troubled with us for, if I may so say, than our unbelieving fears, that keep us off from receiving that strong consolation which he is so willing to give to us.

But you will say, "We are where we were. When God speaks it, we must receive it, that is true; but how shall we know *when he speaks?*"

(1.) I would we could all practically come up to this, to receive peace when we are convinced that God speaks it, and that it is our duty to receive it. But,—

(2.) There is, if I may so say, a secret instinct in faith, whereby it knows the voice of Christ when he speaks indeed; as the babe leaped in the womb when the blessed Virgin came to Elisabeth, faith leaps in the heart when Christ indeed draws nigh to it. "My sheep,"

[1] Ps. li. 1.

Digitized by Google

says Christ, "know my voice," John x. 4;—"They know my voice; they are used to the sound of it;" and they know when his lips are opened to them and are full of grace. The spouse was in a sad condition, Cant. v. 2,—asleep in security; but yet as soon as Christ speaks, she cries, "It is the voice of my beloved that speaks!" She knew his voice, and was so acquainted with communion with him, that instantly she discovers him; and so will you also. If you exercise yourselves to acquaintance and communion with him, you will easily discern between his voice and the voice of a stranger. And take this κριτήριον with you: When he doth speak, he speaks as never man spake; he speaks with power, and one way or other will make your "hearts burn within you," as he did to the disciples, Luke xxiv. He doth it by "putting in his hand at the hole of the door," Cant. v. 4,—his Spirit into your hearts to seize on you.

He that hath his senses exercised to discern good or evil, being increased in judgment and experience by a constant observation of the ways of Christ's intercourse, the manner of the operations of the Spirit, and the effects it usually produceth, is the best judge for himself in this case.

Secondly, If the word of the Lord doth good to your souls, he speaks it; if it humble, if it cleanse, and be useful to those ends for which promises are given,—namely, to endear, to cleanse, to melt and bind to obedience, to self-emptiness, etc. But this is not my business; nor shall I farther divert in the pursuit of this direction. Without the observation of it, sin will have great advantages towards the hardening of the heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

The general use of the foregoing directions—The great direction for the accomplishment of the work aimed at: Act faith on Christ—The several ways whereby this may be done—Consideration of the fulness in Christ for relief proposed—Great expectations from Christ—Grounds of these expectations: his mercifulness, his faithfulness—Event of such expectations; on the part of Christ; on the part of believers—Faith peculiarly to be acted on the death of Christ, Rom. vi. 3–6—The work of the Spirit in this whole business.

Now, the considerations which I have hitherto insisted on are rather of things *preparatory* to the work aimed at than such as will *effect* it. It is the heart's due preparation for the work itself, without which it will not be accomplished, that hitherto I have aimed at.

Digitized by Google

Directions for the work itself are very few; I mean that are peculiar to it. And they are these that follow:—

1. Set faith at work on Christ for the *killing* of thy sin. His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this, and thou wilt die a conqueror; yea, thou wilt, through the good providence of God, live to see thy lust dead at thy feet.

But thou wilt say, "How shall faith act itself on Christ for this end and purpose?" I say, Sundry ways:—

(1.) By faith fill thy soul with a due consideration of that *provision* which is laid up in Jesus Christ for this end and purpose, that all thy lusts, this very lust wherewith thou art entangled, may be mortified. By faith ponder on this, that though thou art no way able in or by thyself to get the conquest over thy distemper, though thou art even weary of contending, and art utterly ready to faint, yet that there is enough in Jesus Christ to yield thee relief, Phil. iv. 13. It staid the prodigal, when he was [1]ready to faint, that yet there was bread enough in his father's house; though he was at a distance from it, yet it relieved him, and staid him, that there it was. In thy greatest distress and anguish, consider that fulness of grace, those riches, those [2]treasures of strength, might, and help, that are laid up in him for our support, John i. 16, Col. i. 19. Let them come into and abide in thy mind. Consider that he is "exalted and made a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance unto Israel," Acts v. 31; and if to give repentance, to give mortification, without which the other is not, nor can be. Christ tells us that we obtain purging grace by abiding in him, John xv. 3. To act faith upon the fulness that is in Christ for our supply is an eminent way of abiding in Christ, for both our insition and abode is by faith, Rom. xi. 19, 20. Let, then, thy soul by faith be exercised with such thoughts and apprehensions as these: "I am a poor, weak creature; unstable as water, I cannot excel. This corruption is too hard for me, and is at the very door of ruining my soul; and what to do I know not. My soul is become as parched ground, and an habitation of dragons. I have made promises and broken them; vows and engagements have been as a thing of nought. Many persuasions have I had that I had got the victory and should be delivered, but I am deceived; so that I plainly see, that without some eminent succour and assistance, I am lost, and shall be prevailed on to an utter relinquishment of God. But yet, though this be my state and condition, let the hands that hang down be lifted up, and the feeble knees be strengthened. Behold, [3]the Lord Christ, that hath all fulness of grace in his heart, all fulness of power in his hand, he is able to slay all these his enemies. There is sufficient provision in him for my relief and assist-

[1] Luke xv. 17. [2] Isa. xl. 28-31. [3] John i. 16; Matt. xxviii. 18.

Digitized by Google

ance. He can take my drooping, dying soul and make me more than a conqueror.[1] 'Why sayest thou, O my soul, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint,' Isa. xl. 27–31. He can make the 'dry, parched ground of my soul to become a pool, and my thirsty, barren heart as springs of water;' yea, he can make this 'habitation of dragons,' this heart, so full of abominable lusts and fiery temptations, to be a place for 'grass' and fruit to himself," Isa. xxxv. 7. So God staid Paul, under his temptation, with the consideration of the sufficiency of his grace: "My grace is sufficient for thee," 2 Cor. xii. 9. Though he were not immediately so far made partaker of it as to be freed from his temptation, yet the sufficiency of it in God, for that end and purpose, was enough to stay his spirit. I say, then, by faith, be much in the consideration of that supply and the fulness of it that is in Jesus Christ, and how he can at any time give thee strength and deliverance. Now, if hereby thou dost not find success to a conquest, yet thou wilt be staid in the chariot, that thou shalt not fly out of the field until the battle be ended; thou wilt be kept from an utter despondency and a lying down under thy unbelief, or a turning aside to false means and remedies, that in the issue will not relieve thee. The efficacy of this consideration will be found only in the practice.

(2.) Raise up thy heart by faith to an *expectation of relief* from Christ. Relief in this case from Christ is like the prophet's vision, Hab. ii. 3, "It is for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, yet wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." Though it may seem somewhat long to thee, whilst thou art under thy trouble and perplexity, yet it shall surely come in the appointed time of the Lord Jesus; which is the best season. If, then, thou canst raise up thy heart to a settled expectation of relief from Jesus Christ,—if thine eyes are towards him "as the eyes of a servant to the hand of his master,"[2] when he expects to receive somewhat from him,—thy soul shall be satisfied, he will assuredly deliver thee; he will slay the lust, and thy latter end shall be peace. Only look for it at his hand; expect when and how he will do it. [3]"If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

[1] Rom. viii. 37. [2] Ps. cxxiii. 2. [3] Isa. vii. 9.

Digitized by Google

But wilt thou say, "What ground have I to build such an expectation upon, so that I may expect not to be deceived?"

As thou hast necessity to put thee on this course, thou must be relieved and saved this way or none. To[1] whom wilt thou go? So there are in the Lord Jesus innumerable things to encourage and engage thee to this expectation.

For the necessity of it, I have in part discovered it before, when I manifested that this is the work of faith and of believers only. "Without me," says Christ, "ye can do nothing," John xv. 5; speaking with especial relation to the purging of the heart from sin, verse 2. Mortification of any sin must be by a supply of grace. Of ourselves we cannot do it. Now, "it hath pleased the Father that in Christ should all fulness dwell," Col. i. 19; that "of his fulness we might receive grace for grace," John i. 16. He is the head from whence the new man must have influences of life and strength, or it will decay every day. If[2] we are "strengthened with might in the inner man," it is by "Christ's dwelling in our hearts by faith," Eph. iii. 16, 17. That this work is not to be done without the Spirit I have also showed before. Whence, then, do we expect the Spirit? from whom do we look for him? who hath promised him to us, having procured him for us? Ought not all our expectations to this purpose to be on Christ alone? Let this, then, be fixed upon thy heart, that if thou hast not relief from him thou shalt never have any. All ways, endeavours, contendings, that are not animated by this expectation of relief from Christ and him only are to no purpose, will do thee no good; yea, if they are any thing but supportments of thy heart in this expectation, or means appointed by himself for the receiving help from him, they are in vain.

Now, farther to engage thee to this expectation,—

(1.) Consider his *mercifulness*, tenderness, and kindness, as he is our great High Priest at the right hand of God. Assuredly he pities thee in thy distress; saith he, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you," Isa. lxvi. 13. He hath the tenderness of a mother to a sucking child. Heb. ii. 17, 18, "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." How is the ability of Christ upon the account of his suffering proposed to us? "In that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able." Did the sufferings and temptations of Christ add to his ability and power? Not, doubtless, considered absolutely and in it itself. But the ability here mentioned is such as hath readi-

[1] John vi. 68. [2] Col. i. 11.

Digitized by Google

ness, proneness, willingness to put itself forth, accompanying of it; it is an ability of will against all dissuasions. He is able, having suffered and been tempted, to break through all dissuasions to the contrary, to relieve poor tempted souls: Δύναται βοηθῆσαι,—"He is able to help." It is a metonymy of the effect; for, he can now be moved to help, having been so tempted. So chap. iv. 15, 16: "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." The exhortation of verse 16 is the same that I am upon,—namely, that we would entertain expectations of relief from Christ, which the apostle there calls χάριν εἰς εὔκαιρον βοήθειαν, "grace for seasonable help." "If ever," says the soul, "help were seasonable, it would be so to me in my present condition. This is that which I long for,—grace for seasonable help. I am ready to die, to perish, to be lost for ever; iniquity will prevail against me, if help come not in." Says the apostle, "Expect this help, this relief, this grace from Christ." Yea, but on what account? That which he lays down, verse 15. And we may observe that the word, verse 16, which we have translated to "obtain," is λάβωμεν. Ἵνα λάβωμεν ἔλεον, "That we may receive it;" suitable and seasonable help will come in. I shall freely say, this one thing of establishing the soul by faith in expectation of relief from Jesus Christ,[1] on the account of his mercifulness as our high priest, will be more available to the ruin of thy lust and distemper, and have a better and speedier issue, than all the rigidest means of self-maceration that ever any of the sons of men engaged themselves unto. Yea, let me add, that never any soul did or shall perish by the power of any lust, sin, or corruption, who could raise his soul by faith to an expectation of relief from Jesus Christ.[2]

(2.) Consider His *faithfulness* who hath promised; which may raise thee up and confirm thee in this waiting in an expectation of relief. He hath promised to relieve in such cases, and he will fulfil his word to the utmost. God tells us that his covenant with us is like the "ordinances" of heaven, the sun, moon, and stars, which have their certain courses, Jer. xxxi. 36. Thence David said that he watched for relief from God "as one watched for the morning,"[3]—a thing that will certainly come in its appointed season. So will be thy relief from Christ. It will come in its season, as the dew and rain upon the parched ground; for faithful is he who hath promised. Particular promises to this purpose are innumerable; with some of them, that seem peculiarly to suit his condition, let the soul be always furnished.

[1] Matt. xi. 28. [2] Isa. lv. 1–8; Rev. iii. 18. [3] Ps. cxxx. 6.

Digitized by Google

Now, there are two eminent advantages which always attend this expectation of succour from Jesus Christ:—

[1.] It engages him to a full and speedy assistance. Nothing doth more engage the heart of a man to be useful and helpful to another than his expectation of help from him, if justly raised and countenanced by him who is to give the relief. Our Lord Jesus hath raised our hearts, by his kindness, care, and promises, to this expectation; certainly our rising up unto it must needs be a great engagement upon him to assist us accordingly. This the Psalmist gives us as an approved maxim, "Thou, LORD, never forsakest them that put their trust in thee." When the heart is once won to rest in God, to repose himself on him, he will assuredly satisfy it. He will never be as water that fails; nor hath he said at any time to the seed of Jacob, "Seek ye my face in vain." If Christ be chosen for the foundation of our supply, he will not fail us.

[2.] It engages the heart to attend diligently to all the ways and means whereby Christ is wont to communicate himself to the soul; and so takes in the real assistance of all graces and ordinances whatever. He that expects any thing from a man, applies himself to the ways and means whereby it may be obtained. The beggar that expects an alms lies at his door or in his way from whom he doth expect it. The way whereby and the means wherein Christ communicates himself is, and are, his ordinances ordinarily; he that expects any thing from him must attend upon him therein. It is the expectation of faith that sets the heart on work. It is not an idle, groundless hope that I speak of. If now there be any vigour, efficacy, and power in prayer or sacrament to this end of mortifying sin, a man will assuredly be interested in it all by this expectation of relief from Christ. On this account I reduce all particular actings, by prayer, meditation, and the like, to this head; and so shall not farther insist on them, when they are grounded on this bottom and spring from this root. They are of singular use to this purpose, and not else.

Now, on this direction for the mortification of a prevailing distemper you may have a thousand "probatum est's." Who have walked with God under this temptation, and have not found the use and success of it? I dare leave the soul under it, without adding any more. Only some particulars relating thereunto may be mentioned:—

First, Act faith *peculiarly upon the death*, blood, and cross of Christ; that is, on Christ as crucified and slain. Mortification of sin is peculiarly from the death of Christ. It is one peculiar, yea, eminent end of the death of Christ, which shall assuredly be accomplished by it. He died to destroy the works of the devil. Whatever came upon our natures by his first temptation, whatever receives strength in our persons by his daily suggestions, Christ died to destroy it all. "He gave

Digitized by Google

himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works," Tit. ii. 14. This was his aim and intendment (wherein he will not fail) in his giving himself for us. That we might be freed from the power of our sins, and purified from all our defiling lusts, was his design. "He gave himself for the church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish," Eph. v. 25–27. And this, by virtue of his death, in various and several degrees, shall be accomplished. Hence our washing, purging, and cleansing is everywhere ascribed to his blood, 1 John i. 7; Heb. i. 3; Rev. i. 5. That being sprinkled on us, "purges our consciences from dead works to serve the living God," Heb. ix. 14. This is that we aim at, this we are in pursuit of,—that our consciences may be purged from dead works, that they may be rooted out, destroyed, and have place in us no more. This shall certainly be brought about by the death of Christ; there will virtue go out from thence to this purpose. Indeed, all supplies of the Spirit, all communications of grace and power, are from hence; as I have elsewhere[1] showed. Thus the apostle states it; Rom. vi. 2, is the case proposed that we have in hand: "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" —"Dead to sin by profession; dead to sin by obligation to be so; dead to sin by participation of virtue and power for the killing of it; dead to sin by union and interest in Christ, in and by whom it is killed: how shall we live therein?" This he presses by sundry considerations, all taken from the death of Christ, in the ensuing verses. This must not be: verse 3, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" We have in baptism an evidence of our implantation into Christ; we are baptized into him: but what of him are we baptized into an interest in? "His death," saith he. If indeed we are baptized into Christ, and beyond outward profession, we are baptized into his death. The explication of this, of one being baptized into the death of Christ, the apostle gives us, verses 4, 6: "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." "This is," saith he, "our being baptized into the death of Christ, namely, our conformity thereunto; to be dead unto sin, to have our corruptions mortified, as he was put to death for sin: so that as he was raised up to glory, we may be raised up to grace and newness of life." He tells us whence it is that we have this baptism into the death of Christ, verse 6; and

[1] Communion with Christ, vol. ii. chapters vii. viii.

Digitized by Google

this is from the death of Christ itself: "Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed;" συνεσταυρώθη, "is crucified with him," not in respect of time, but causality. We are crucified with him *meritoriously*, in that he procured the Spirit for us to mortify sin; *efficiently*, in that from his death virtue comes forth for our crucifying; in the way of a *representation* and *exemplar* we shall assuredly be crucified unto sin, as he was for our sin. This is that the apostle intends: Christ by his death destroying the works of the devil, procuring the Spirit for us, hath so killed sin, as to its reign in believers, that it shall not obtain its end and dominion.

Secondly, Then act faith on the death of Christ, and that under these two notions,—first, In expectation of *power;* secondly, In endeavours for *conformity.*[1] For the first, the direction given in general may suffice; as to the latter, that of the apostle may give us some light into our direction, Gal. iii. 1. Let faith look on Christ in the gospel as he is set forth dying and crucified for us. Look on him under the weight[2] of our sins, praying, bleeding, dying; bring him in that condition into thy heart by faith; apply his blood so shed to thy corruptions: do this daily. I might draw out this consideration to a great length, in sundry particulars, but I must come to a close.

2. I have only, then, to add the heads of the work of the Spirit in this business of mortification, which is so peculiarly ascribed to him.

In one word: This whole work, which I have described as our duty, is effected, carried on, and accomplished by the power of the Spirit, in all the parts and degrees of it; as,—

(1.) He alone *clearly and fully convinces* the heart of the evil and guilt and danger of the corruption, lust, or sin to be mortified. Without this conviction, or whilst it is so faint that the heart can wrestle with it or digest it, there will be no thorough work made. An unbelieving heart (as in part we have all such) will shift with any consideration, until it be overpowered by clear and evident convictions. Now this is the proper work of the Spirit: "He convinces of sin," John xvi. 8; he alone can do it. If men's rational considerations, with the preaching of the letter, were able to convince them of sin, we should, it may be, see more convictions than we do. There comes by the preaching of the word an apprehension upon the understandings of men that they are sinners, that such and such things are sins, that themselves are guilty of them; but this light is not powerful, nor doth it lay hold on the practical principles of the soul, so as to conform the mind and will unto them, to produce effects suitable to such an apprehension. And therefore it is that wise and knowing men, destitute of the Spirit, do not think those things to be sins at all wherein the

[1] Phil. iii. 10; Col. iii. 3; 1 Pet. i. 18, 19.
[2] 1 Cor. xv. 3; 1 Pet. i. 18, 19, v. 1, 2; Col. i. 18, 14.

Digitized by Google

chief movings and actings of lust do consist. It is the Spirit alone that can do, that doth, this work to the purpose. And this is the first thing that the Spirit doth in order to the mortification of any lust whatever,—it convinces the soul of all the evil of it, cuts off all its pleas, discovers all its deceits, stops all its evasions, answers its pretences, makes the soul own its abomination, and lie down under the sense of it. Unless this be done all that follows is in vain.

(2.) The Spirit alone reveals unto us *the fulness of Christ* for our relief; which is the consideration that stays the heart from false ways and from despairing despondency, 1 Cor. ii. 8.

(3.) The Spirit alone *establishes* the heart in expectation of relief from Christ; which is the great sovereign means of mortification, as hath been discovered, 2 Cor. i. 21.

(4.) The Spirit alone brings the *cross* of Christ into our hearts with its sin-killing power; for by the Spirit are we baptized into the death of Christ.

(5.) The Spirit is the author and finisher of our *sanctification;* gives new supplies and influences of grace for holiness and sanctification, when the contrary principle is weakened and abated, Eph. iii. 16–18.

(6.) In all the soul's addresses to God in this condition, it hath *supportment* from the Spirit. Whence is the power, life, and vigour of prayer? whence its efficacy to prevail with God? Is it not from the Spirit? He is the "Spirit of supplications" promised to them "who look on him whom they have pierced," Zech. xii. 10, enabling them "to pray with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered," Rom. viii. 26. This is confessed to be the great medium or way of faith's prevailing with God. Thus Paul dealt with his temptation, whatever it were: "I besought the Lord that it might depart from me."[1] What is the work of the Spirit in prayer, whence and how it gives us in assistance and makes us to prevail, what we are to do that we may enjoy his help for that purpose, is not my present intendment to demonstrate.

[1] 2 Cor. xii. 8.

Digitized by Google

OF TEMPTATION:

THE NATURE AND POWER OF IT; THE DANGER OF ENTERING INTO IT; AND THE MEANS OF PREVENTING THAT DANGER:

WITH

A RESOLUTION OF SUNDRY CASES THEREUNTO BELONGING.

"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."—Rev. iii. 10.

Digitized by Google

PREFATORY NOTE.

THIS small work of Dr Owen on "Temptation" appeared in 1658. He had been urged to publish it by the solicitations of friends to whose opinion he paid deference. The probability is, that they had already heard the substance of it in discourses from the pulpit; and, from an expression in the closing exhortation (see p. 150), the discourses must have been delivered in Oxford. The motives of the author in committing it to the press are still farther evinced in some allusions to the character of the times, which will be found both in the preface and in the treatise itself. The vigilant eye of Owen detected certain mischievous effects accruing from the eminent success which had attended hitherto the efforts of the party with whom he acted. The fear of a common danger had formerly kept them united in their views and movements, while it led them to depend upon the true source of all strength and hope. They were now sinking into those strifes and divisions which paved the way for the restoration of monarchy; and Owen speaks of "a visible declension from reformation seizing upon the professing party of these nations." There is a tone of indignant and yet pathetic faithfulness in his language, as he recurs to the subject of this declension in the body of the treatise: "He that should see the prevailing party of these nations, many of them in rule, power, and favour, with all their adherents, and remember that they were a colony of Puritans, whose habitation was in a 'low place,' as the prophet speaks of the city of God, translated by a high hand to the mountains they now possess, cannot but wonder how soon they have forgot the customs, manners, ways, of their own old people, and are cast into the mould of them that went before them in the places whereunto they are translated." Owen may have feared the issue of prevailing divisions, and anticipated the revival of the intolerant system which the patriotism of the Long Parliament and the military genius of Cromwell overthrew. Under the impression that an hour of temptation had come, and that the best security for religious principles was the advancement of personal godliness, he published the following treatise.

Whatever motives incited him to the preparation of it, the whole work, with the exception of a few paragraphs, might have been written, with set purpose, for the people of God in every age. In no work is the sound judgment of our author more conspicuous. He avoids all fanciful speculations into the mysteries of satanic agency, such as were too common on this theme. He is too much in earnest that his readers should be brought into a condition of safety against the wiles of the devil, to break the force of his warnings and entreaties by ingenious speculations and irrelevant learning. Not merely in the warm appeals interspersed with his expositions, but in the patient care with which no nook of the heart is left unsearched, does the deep solicitude of Owen for the spiritual welfare of his readers appear. To one who reads the treatise in the spirit with which the author wrote it,—simply that he may judge his own heart, and know what temptation means, and be fully on his guard against it,—the effect is far beyond what the mere wealth of fancy or the arts of rhetoric could produce.

From the text, Matt. xxvi. 41, the author considers in succession three topics educed from it:—temptation, the means by which it prevails, and the way of preventing it. The most of the treatise is occupied with the last topic,—the means of prevention. It is subdivided into inquiries,—as to the evidence by which a man may know that he has entered into temptation, the directions requisite to prevent him entering into it, and the seasons when temptation may be apprehended. The discussion of this last inquiry merges very much into an illustration of the Christian duty of watchfulness, and the treatise is closed by a general exhortation to this duty. Slight defects in the arrangement, the renewed discussion of a point after it had been quitted, and the disproportionate space accorded to some parts of the subject, are explained, perhaps, by the circumstance that the treatise was originally a series of discourses.—ED.

Digitized by Google

TO THE READER.

CHRISTIAN READER,

IF thou art in any measure awake in these days wherein we live, and hast taken notice of the manifold, great, and various temptations wherewith all sorts of persons that know the Lord and profess his name are beset, and whereunto they are continually exposed, with what success those temptations have obtained, to the unspeakable scandal of the gospel, with the wounding and ruin of innumerable souls, I suppose thou wilt not inquire any farther after other reasons of the publishing of the ensuing warnings and directions, being suited to the times that pass over us, and thine own concernment in them. This I shall only say to those who think meet to persist in any such inquiry, that though my first engagement for the exposing of these meditations unto public view did arise from the desires of some, whose avouching the interest of Christ in the world by personal holiness and constant adhering to every thing that is made precious by its relation to him, have given them power over me to require at any time services of greater importance; yet I dare not lay my doing of it so upon that account, as in the least to intimate that, with respect to the general state of things mentioned, I did not myself esteem it seasonable and necessary. The variety of outward providences and dispensations wherewith I have myself been exercised in this world, with the inward trials they have been attended withal, added to the observation that I have had advantages to make of the ways and walkings of others,—their beginnings, progresses, and endings, their risings and falls, in profession and conversation, in darkness and light,—have left such a constant sense and impression of the power and danger of temptations upon my mind and spirit, that, without other pleas and pretences, I cannot but own a serious call unto men to beware, with a discovery of some of the most eminent ways and means of the prevalency of present temptations, to have been, in my own judgment, in this season needful.

But now, reader, if thou art amongst them, who takest no notice of these things, or carest not for them,—who hast no sense of the efficacy and dangers of temptations in thine own walking and profession, nor hast observed the power of them upon others,—who discernest not the manifold advantages that they have got in these days, wherein all things are shaken, nor hast been troubled or moved for the sad successes they have had amongst professors; but supposest that all things are well within doors and without, and would be better couldst thou obtain fuller satisfaction to some of thy lusts in the pleasures or profits of the world,—I desire thee to know that I write not for thee, nor do esteem thee a fit reader or judge of what is here written. Whilst all the issues of providential dispensations, in reference to the public concernments of these nations, are perplexed and entangled, the footsteps of God lying in the deep, where his paths are not known; whilst, in particular, unparalleled distresses and strange prosperities are measured out to men, yea, to professors; whilst a spirit of error, giddiness, and delusion goes

Digitized by Google

forth with such strength and efficacy, as it seems to have received a commission to go and prosper; whilst there are such divisions, strifes, emulations, attended with such evil surmises, wrath, and revenge, found amongst brethren; whilst the desperate issues and products of men's temptations are seen daily in partial and total apostasy, in the decay of love, the overthrow of faith, our days being filled with fearful examples of backsliding, such as former ages never knew; whilst there is a visible declension from reformation seizing upon the professing party of these nations, both as to personal holiness and zeal for the interest of Christ;—he that understands not that there is an "hour of temptation" come upon the world, to "try them that dwell upon the earth," is doubtless either himself at present captivated under the power of some woful lust, corruption, or temptation, or is indeed stark blind, and knows not at all what it is to serve God in temptations. With such, then, I have not at present to do. For those who have in general a sense of these things,—who also, in some measure, are able to consider that the plague is begun, that they may be farther awakened to look about them, lest the infection have approached nearer to them, by some secret and imperceptible ways, than they did apprehend; or lest they should be surprised at unawares hereafter by any of those temptations that in these days either waste at noon or else walk in darkness,—is the ensuing warning intended. And for the sake of them that mourn in secret for all the abominations that are found among and upon them that profess the gospel, and who are under the conduct of the Captain of their salvation, fighting and resisting the power of temptations, from what spring soever they rise in themselves, are the ensuing directions proposed to consideration.

That our faithful and merciful High Priest, who both suffered and was tempted, and is on that account touched with the feeling of our infirmities, would accompany this small discourse with seasonable supplies of his Spirit and suitable mercy to them that shall consider it, that it may be useful to his servants for the ends whereunto it is designed, is the prayer of him who received this handful of seed from his storehouse and treasure,

JOHN OWEN.

Digitized by Google

OF TEMPTATION:

THE NATURE AND POWER OF IT, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

The words of the text, that are the foundation of the ensuing discourse—The occasion of the words, with their dependence—The things specially aimed at in them—Things considerable in the words as to the general purpose in hand—Of the general nature of temptation, wherein it consists—The special nature of temptation—Temptation taken actively and passively—How God tempts any—His ends in so doing—The way whereby he doth it—Of temptation in its special nature: of the actions of it—The true nature of temptation stated.

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."—MATT. xxvi. 41.

THESE words of our Saviour are repeated with very little alteration in three evangelists; only, whereas Matthew and Mark have recorded them as above written, Luke reporteth them thus: "Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation;" so that the whole of his caution seems to have been, "Arise, watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

Solomon tells us of some that "lie down on the top of a mast in the midst of the sea," Prov. xxiii. 34,—men overborne by security in the mouth of destruction. If ever poor souls lay down on the top of a mast in the midst of the sea, these disciples with our Saviour in the garden did so. Their Master, at a little distance from them, was "offering up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears," Heb. v. 7, being then taking into his hand and beginning to [1]taste that cup that was filled with the curse and wrath due to their sins;—the Jews, armed for *his* and *their* destruction, being but a little more distant from them, on the other hand. Our Saviour had a little before informed them that that night he should be betrayed, and be delivered up to be slain; they saw that he was "sorrowful, and very heavy," Matt. xxvi. 37; nay, he told them plainly that his "soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," verse 38, and therefore

[1] Heb. ii. 9; Gal. iii. 13; 2 Cor. v. 21.

Digitized by Google

entreated them to tarry and watch with him, now he was dying, and that for them. In this condition, leaving them but a little space, like men forsaken of all love towards him or care of themselves, they fall fast asleep! Even the best of saints, being left to themselves, will quickly appear to be less than men,—to be nothing. All our own strength is weakness, and all our wisdom folly. Peter being one of them,—who but a little before had with so much self-confidence affirmed that though all men forsook him, yet he never would so do,—our Saviour expostulates the matter in particular with him: verse 40, "He saith unto Peter, Could you not watch with me one hour?" as if he should have said, "Art thou he, Peter, who but now boastedst of thy resolution never to forsake me? Is it likely that thou shouldst hold out therein, when thou canst not watch with me one hour? Is this thy dying for me, to be dead in security, when I am dying for thee?" And indeed it would be an amazing thing to consider that Peter should make so high a promise, and be immediately so careless and remiss in the pursuit of it, but that we find the root of the same treachery abiding and working in our own hearts, and do see the fruit of it brought forth every day, the most noble engagements unto obedience quickly ending in deplorable negligence, Rom. vii. 18.

In this estate our Saviour admonishes them of their condition, their weakness, their danger, and stirs them up to a prevention of that ruin which lay at the door: saith he, "Arise, watch and pray."

I shall not insist on the particular aimed at here by our Saviour, in this caution to them that were then present with him; the great temptation that was coming on them, from the scandal of the cross, was doubtless in his eye;—but I shall consider the words as containing a general direction to all the disciples of Christ, in their following of him throughout all generations.

There are three things in the words:—

I. The *evil* cautioned against,—*temptation.*

II. The *means* of its prevalency,—by our *entering into it.*

III. The *way* of preventing it,—*watch and pray.*

It is not in my thoughts to handle the common-place of temptations, but only the danger of them in general, with the means of preventing that danger; yet, that we may know what we affirm, and whereof we speak, some concernments of the general nature of temptation may be premised.

I. First, For the *general* nature of tempting and temptation, it lies among things indifferent; to try, to experiment, to prove, to pierce a vessel, that the liquor that is in it may be known, is as much as is signified by it. Hence God is said sometime to tempt; and we are commanded as our duty to tempt, or try, or search ourselves, to know what is in us, and to pray that God would do so also. So tempta-

Digitized by Google

tion is like a knife, that may either cut the meat or the throat of a man; it may be his food or his poison, his exercise or his destruction.

Secondly, Temptation in its *special* nature, as it denotes any evil, is considered either actively, as it *leads* to evil, or passively, as it *hath* an evil and suffering in it: so temptation is taken for affliction, James i. 2; for in that sense, we are to "count it all joy when we fall into temptation;" in the other, that we "enter not into it."

Again, actively considered, it either denotes in the tempter a design for the bringing about of the special end of temptation, namely, *a leading into evil;* so it is said, that "God tempts no man," James i. 13, with a design for sin as such;—or the general nature and end of temptation, which is trial; so "God tempted Abraham," Gen. xxii. 1. And he proveth or tempteth by false prophets, Deut. xiii. 3.

Now, as to God's tempting of any, two things are to be considered:—1. The end why he doth it; 2. The way whereby he doth it.

1. For the first, his general ends are two:—

(1.) He doth it to *show* unto man what is in him,—that is, the man himself; and that either as to his grace or to his corruption. (I speak not now of it as it may have a place and bear a part in judiciary obduration.) Grace and corruption lie deep in the heart; men oftentimes deceive themselves in the search after the one or the other of them. When we give vent to the soul, to try what grace is there, corruption comes out; and when we search for corruption, grace appears. So is the soul kept in uncertainty; we fail in our trials. God comes with a gauge that goes to the bottom. He sends his instruments of trial into the bowels and the inmost parts of the soul, and lets man see what is in him, of what metal he is constituted. Thus he tempted Abraham to show him his *faith.* Abraham knew not what faith he had (I mean, what power and vigour was in his faith) until God drew it out by that great trial and temptation.[1] When God says he knew it, he made Abraham know it. So he tried Hezekiah to discover his *pride;* God left him that he might see what was in his heart, 2 Chron. xxxii. 31. He knew not that he had such a proud heart, so apt to be lifted up, as he appeared to have, until God tried him, and so let out his filth, and poured it out before his face. The issues of such discoveries to the saints, in thankfulness, humiliation, and treasuring up of experiences, I shall not treat of.

(2.) God doth it to *show himself* unto man, and that,—

[1.] In a way of *preventing grace.* A man shall see that it is God alone who keeps from all sin. Until we are tempted, we think we live on our own strength. Though all men do this or that, we will not. When the trial comes, we quickly see whence is our preserva-

[1] Gen. xxii. 1, 2.

Digitized by Google

tion, by standing or falling. So was it in the case of Abimelech, Gen. xx. 6, "I withheld thee."

[2.] In a way of *renewing grace.* He would have the temptation continue with St Paul, that he might reveal himself to him in the sufficiency of his renewing grace, 2 Cor. xii. 9. We know not the power and strength that God puts forth in our behalf, nor what is the sufficiency of his grace, until, comparing the temptation with our own weakness, it appears unto us. The efficacy of an antidote is found when poison hath been taken; and the preciousness of medicines is made known by diseases. We shall never know what strength there is in grace if we know not what strength there is in temptation. We must be tried, that we may be made sensible of being preserved. And many other good and gracious ends he hath, which he accomplisheth towards his saints by his trials and temptations, not now to be insisted on.

2. For the ways whereby God accomplisheth this his search, trial, or temptation, these are some of them:—

(1.) He puts men on *great duties,* such as they cannot apprehend that they have any strength for, nor indeed have. So he tempted Abraham by calling him to that duty of *sacrificing his son;*—a thing absurd to reason, bitter to nature, and grievous to him on all accounts whatever. Many men know not what is in them, or rather what is ready for them, until they are put upon what seems utterly above their strength; indeed, upon what is really above their strength. The duties that God, in an ordinary way, requires at our hands are not proportioned to what strength we have in ourselves, but to what help and relief is laid up for us in Christ; and we are to address ourselves to the greatest performances with a settled persuasion that we have not ability for the least. This is the law of grace; but yet, when any duty is required that is extraordinary, that is a secret not often discovered. In the yoke of Christ it is a trial, a temptation.

(2.) By putting them upon *great sufferings.* How many have unexpectedly found strength to die at a stake, to endure tortures for Christ! yet their call to it was a trial. This, Peter tells us, is one way whereby we are brought into trying temptations, 1 Pet. i. 6, 7. Our temptations arise from the "fiery trial;" and yet the end is but a trial of our faith.

(3.) By his providential disposing of things so as that *occasions* unto sin will be administered unto men, which is the case mentioned, Deut. xiii. 3; and innumerable other instances may be adjoined.

Now, they are not properly the temptations of God, as coming from him, with his end upon them, that are here intended; and therefore I shall set these apart from our present consideration. It is, then,

Digitized by Google

temptation in its special nature, as it denotes an *active efficiency towards sinning* (as it is managed with evil unto evil) that I intend.

In this sense temptation may proceed either singly from Satan, or the world, or other men in the world, or from ourselves, or jointly from all or some of them, in their several combinations:—

(1.) Satan tempts sometimes *singly* by himself, without taking advantage from the world, the things or persons of it, or ourselves. So he deals in his injection of evil and blasphemous thoughts of God into the hearts of the saints; which is his own work alone, without any advantage from the world or our own hearts: for nature will contribute nothing thereunto, nor any thing that is in the world, nor any man of the world; for none can conceive a God and conceive evil of him. Herein Satan is alone in the *sin*, and shall be so in the *punishment*. These fiery darts are prepared in the forge of his own malice, and shall, with all their venom and poison, be turned into his own heart for ever.

(2.) Sometimes he makes *use of the world*, and joins forces against us, without any helps from within. So he tempted our Saviour, by "showing him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them."[1] And the variety of the assistances he finds from the world, in persons and things which I must not insist on,—the innumerable instruments and weapons he takes from thence of all sorts and at all seasons,—are inexpressible.

(3.) Sometimes he takes in *assistance from ourselves also*. It is not with us as it was with Christ when Satan came to tempt him. He declares that he "had nothing in him," John xiv. 30. It is otherwise with us: he hath, for the compassing of most of his ends, a sure party within our own breasts, James i. 14, 15. Thus he tempted Judas: he was at work *himself;* he put it into his heart to betray Christ; Luke xxii. 3, "he entered into him" for that purpose. And he sets the *world* at work, the things of it, providing for him "thirty pieces of silver" (verse 5, "They covenanted to give him money"); and the *men of it*, even the priests and the Pharisees; and calleth in the assistance of his *own corruption*,—he was covetous, "a thief, and had the bag."

I might also show how the world and our own corruptions do act singly by themselves, and jointly in conjunction with Satan and one another, in this business of temptation. But the truth is, the principles, ways, and means of temptations, the kinds, degrees, efficacy, and causes of them, are so inexpressibly large and various; the circumstances of them, from providence, natures, conditions, spiritual and natural, with the particular cases thence arising, so innumerable and impossible to be comprised within any bound or order, that to

[1] Matt. iv. 8.

Digitized by Google

attempt the giving an account of them would be to undertake that which would be endless. I shall content myself to give a description of the general nature of that which we are to watch against; which will make way for what I aim at.

Temptation, then, in general, is *any thing, state, way, or condition that, upon any account whatever, hath a force or efficacy to seduce, to draw the mind and heart of a man from its obedience, which God requires of him, into any sin, in any degree of it whatever.*

In particular, that is a temptation to any man which causes or occasions him to sin, or in any thing to go off from his duty, either by *bringing* evil into his heart, or *drawing* out that evil that is in his heart, or any other way diverting him from communion with God, and that constant, equal, universal obedience, in matter and manner, that is required of him.

For the clearing of this description I shall only observe, that though temptation seems to be of a more active importance, and so to denote only the power of seduction to sin itself, yet in the Scripture it is commonly taken in a neuter sense, and denotes the matter of the temptation or the thing whereby we are tempted. And this is a ground of the description I have given of it. Be it what it will, that from any thing whatever, within us or without us, hath advantage to hinder in duty, or to provoke unto or in any way to occasion sin, that is a temptation, and so to be looked on. Be it business, employment, course of life, company, affections, nature, or corrupt design, relations, delights, name, reputation, esteem, abilities, parts or excellencies of body or mind, place, dignity, art,—so far as they further or occasion the promotion of the ends before mentioned, they are all of them no less truly temptations than the most violent solicitations of Satan or allurements of the world, and that soul lies at the brink of ruin who discerns it not. And this will be farther discovered in our process.

CHAPTER II.

What it is to "enter into temptation"—Not barely being tempted—Not to be conquered by it—To fall into it—The force of that expression—Things required unto entering into temptation—Satan or lust more than ordinarily importunate—The soul's entanglement—Seasons of such entanglements discovered—Of the "hour of temptation," Rev. iii. 10, what it is—How any temptation comes to its hour—How it may be known when it is so come—The means of prevention prescribed by our Saviour—Of watching, and what is intended thereby—Of prayer.

II. HAVING showed what temptation is, I come, secondly, to manifest what it is to *enter* into temptation.

Digitized by Google

1. This is not merely to *be tempted.* It is impossible that we should be so freed from temptation as not to be at all tempted. Whilst Satan continues in his power and malice, whilst the world and lust are in being, we shall be tempted. "Christ," says one, "was made like unto us, that he might be tempted; and we are tempted that we may be made like unto Christ." Temptation in general is comprehensive of our whole warfare; as our Saviour calls the time of his ministry the time of his "temptations," Luke xxii. 28. We have no promise that we shall not be tempted at all; nor are to pray for an absolute freedom from temptations, because we have no such promise of being heard therein. The direction we have for our prayers is, "Lead us not into temptation," Matt. vi. 13; it is "entering into temptation" that we are to pray against. We may be tempted, yet not enter into temptation. So that,—

2. Something more is intended by this expression than the *ordinary work* of Satan and our own lusts, which will be sure to tempt us every day. There is something signal in this entering into temptation, that is not the saints' every day's work. It is something that befalls them peculiarly in reference to seduction unto sin, on one account or other, by the way of allurement or affrightment.

3. It is not *to be conquered* by a temptation, to fall down under it, to commit the sin or evil that we are tempted to, or to omit the duties that are opposed. A man may "enter into temptation," and yet not fall under temptation. God can make a way for a man to escape; when he is in, he can break the snare, tread down Satan, and make the soul more than a conqueror, though it have entered into temptation. Christ *entered* into it, but was not in the least *foiled* by it. But,—

4. It is, as the apostle expresseth it, 1 Tim. vi. 9, ἐμπίπτειν, "to fall into temptation," as a man falls into a pit or deep place where are gins or snares, wherewith he is entangled; the man is not presently killed and destroyed, but he is entangled and detained,—he knows not how to get free or be at liberty. So it is expressed again to the same purpose, 1 Cor. x. 13, "No temptation hath taken you;" that is, to be taken by a temptation and to be tangled with it, held in its cords, not finding at present a way to escape. Thence saith Peter, 2 Epist. ii. 9, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations." They are entangled with them; God knows how to deliver them out of them. When we suffer a temptation to enter into us, then we "enter into temptation." Whilst it knocks at the door we are at liberty; but when any temptation comes in and parleys with the heart, reasons with the mind, entices and allures the affections, be it a long or a short time, do it thus insensibly and imperceptibly, or do the soul take notice of it, we "enter into temptation."

Digitized by Google

So, then, unto our entering into temptation is required,—

(1.) That by some *advantage*, or on some occasion, Satan be more earnest than ordinary in his solicitations to sin, by affrightments or allurements, by persecutions or seductions, by himself or others; or that some lust or corruption, by his instigation and advantages of outward objects, provoking, as in prosperity, or terrifying, as in trouble, do tumultuate more than ordinary within us. There is a special acting of the author and principles of temptation required thereunto.

(2.) That the heart be so far entangled with it as to be put to *dispute* and argue in its own defence, and yet not be wholly able to eject or cast out the poison and leaven that hath been injected; but is surprised, if it be never so little off its watch, into an entanglement not easy to be avoided: so that the soul may cry, and pray, and cry again, and yet not be delivered; as Paul "besought the Lord" thrice for the departure of his temptation, and prevailed not. The entanglement continues. And this usually falls out in one of these two seasons:—

[1.] When Satan, by the permission of God, for ends best known to himself, hath got some *peculiar* advantage against the soul; as in the case of Peter,—he sought to winnow him, and prevailed.

[2.] When a man's lusts and corruptions meet with peculiarly provoking *objects* and occasions, through the condition of life that a man is in, with the circumstances of it; as it was with David: of both which afterward.

In this state of things, a man is entered into temptation; and this is called the "hour of temptation," Rev. iii. 10,—the season wherein it grows to a head: the discovery whereof will give farther light into the present inquiry, about what it is to "enter into temptation;" for when the hour of temptation is come upon us, we are entered into it. Every great and pressing temptation hath its hour, a season wherein it grows to a head, wherein it is most vigorous, active, operative, and prevalent. It may be long in rising, it may be long urging, more or less; but it hath a season wherein, from the conjunction of other occurrences, such as those mentioned, outward or inward, it hath a dangerous hour; and then, for the most part, men enter into it. Hence that very temptation, which at one time hath little or no power on a man,—he can despise it, scorn the motions of it, easily resist it,—at another, bears him away quite before it. It hath, from other circumstances and occurrences, got new strength and efficacy, or the man is enervated and weakened; the hour is come, he is entered into it, and it prevails. David probably had temptations before, in his younger days, to adultery or murder, as he had in the case of Nabal; but the hour of temptation was not come, it had not got its advantages about it, and so he escaped until afterward. Let men look for it that

Digitized by Google

are exposed unto temptations, as who is not? They will have a season wherein their solicitations will be more urgent, their reasonings more plausible, pretences more glorious, hopes of recovery more appearing, opportunities more broad and open, the doors of evil made more beautiful than ever they have been. Blessed is he who is prepared for such a season; without which there is no escaping. This, as I said, is the first thing required to entering into temptation; if we stay here, we are safe.

Before I descend to other particulars, having now entered hereon, I shall show in general,—1*st.* How or by what means commonly any temptation attains its *hour;* 2*dly.* How we may know when any temptation is come to its high *noon,* and is in its hour.

1*st.* It doth the first by several ways:—

(1*st.*) By long *solicitations,* causing the mind frequently to converse with the evil solicited unto, it begets extenuating thoughts of it. If it makes this process, it is coming towards its hour. It may be when first it began to press upon the soul, the soul was amazed with the ugly appearance of what it aimed at, and cried, "Am I a dog?" If this indagation be not daily heightened, but the soul, by conversing with the evil, begins to grow, as it were, familiar with it, not to be startled as formerly, but rather inclines to cry, "Is it not a little one?" then the temptation is coming towards its high noon; lust hath then enticed and entangled, and is ready to "conceive," James i. 15: of which more at large afterward, in our inquiry how we may know whether we are entered into temptation or no. Our present inquest is after the hour and power of temptation itself.

(2*dly.*) When it hath prevailed on *others,* and the soul is not *filled with dislike* and abhorrency of them and their ways, nor with pity and prayer for their deliverance. This proves an advantage unto it, and raises it towards its height. When that temptation sets upon any one which, at the same time, hath possessed and prevailed with many, it hath so great and so many advantages thereby, that it is surely growing towards its hour. Its prevailing with others is a means to give it its hour against us. The falling off of Hymeneus and Philetus is said to "overthrow the faith of some," 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18.

(3*dly.*) By *complicating* itself with many considerations that, perhaps, are not absolutely evil. So did the temptation of the Galatians to fall from the purity of the gospel,—freedom from persecution, union and consent with the Jews. Things in themselves good were pleaded in it, and gave life to the temptation itself. But I shall not now insist on the several advantages that any temptation hath to heighten and greaten itself, to make itself prevalent and effectual, with the contribution that it receives to this purpose from various

Digitized by Google

circumstances, opportunities, specious pleas and pretences, necessities for the doing that which cannot be done without answering the temptation, and the like; because I must speak unto some of them afterward.

2*dly.* For the second, it may be known,—

(1*st.*) By its restless *urgency* and arguing. When a temptation is in its hour it is restless; it is the time of battle, and it gives the soul no rest. Satan sees his advantage, considers his conjunction of forces, and knows that he must now prevail, or be hopeless for ever. Here are opportunities, here are advantages, here are specious pleas and pretences; some ground is already got by former arguings; here are extenuations of the evil, hopes of pardon by after endeavours, all in a readiness: if he can do nothing now, he must sit down lost in his undertakings. So when he had got all things in a readiness against Christ, he made it the "hour of darkness." When a temptation discovers "mille nocendi artes," presses within doors by imaginations and reasonings, without by solicitations, advantages, and opportunities, let the soul know that the hour of it is come, and the glory of God, with its own welfare, depends on its behaviour in this trial; as we shall see in the particular cases following.

(2*dly.*) When it makes a conjunction of *affrightments and allurements*, these two comprise the whole forces of temptation. When both are brought together, temptation is in its hour. They were both in David's case as to the murder of Uriah. There was the fear of his revenge on his wife, and possibly on himself, and fear of the publication of his sin at least; and there was the allurement of his present enjoyment of her whom he lusted after. Men sometimes are carried into sin by love to it, and are continued in it by fear of what will ensue upon it. But in any case, where these two meet, something allures us, something affrights us, and the reasonings that run between them are ready to entangle us,—then is the hour of temptation.

This, then, it is to "enter into temptation," this is the "hour" of it; of which more in the process of our discourse.

III. There is the means of prevention prescribed by our Saviour; they are two:—1. "Watch;" 2. "Pray."

1. The first is a general expression, by no means to be limited to its native signification of waking from sleep; to watch is as much as to be on our guard, to take heed, to consider all ways and means whereby an enemy may approach to us: so the apostle, 1 Cor. xvi. 13. This it is to "watch" in this business, to "stand fast in the faith," as good soldiers, to "quit ourselves like men." It is as much as προσέχειν, to "take heed," or look to ourselves, as the same thing is by our Saviour often expressed; so Rev. iii. 2. A universal careful-

Digitized by Google

ness and diligence, exercising itself in and by all ways and means prescribed by God, over our hearts and ways, the baits and methods of Satan, the occasions and advantages of sin in the world, that we be not entangled, is that which in this word is pressed on us.

2. For the second direction, of prayer, I need not speak to it. The duty and its concernments are known to all. I shall only add, that these two comprise the whole endeavour of faith for the soul's preservation from temptation.

CHAPTER III.

The doctrine—Grounds of it; our Saviour's direction in this case—His promise of preservation—Issues of men entering into temptation—1. Of ungrounded professors—2. Of the choicest saints, Adam, Abraham, David—Self-consideration as to our own weakness—The power of a man's heart to withstand temptation considered—The considerations that it useth for that purpose—The power of temptation; it darkens the mind—The several ways whereby it doth so—1. By fixing the imaginations—2. By entangling the affections—3. Temptations give fuel to lust—The end of temptation considered, with the issue of former temptations—Some objections answered.

HAVING thus opened the words in the foregoing chapters so far as is necessary to discover the foundation of the truth to be insisted on and improved, I shall lay it down in the ensuing observation:—

It is the great duty of all believers to use all diligence in the ways of Christ's appointment, that they fall not into temptation.

I know God is "able to deliver the godly out of temptations;" I know he is "faithful not to suffer us to be tempted above what we are able, but will make a way for our escape:" yet I dare say I shall convince all those who will attend unto what is delivered and written, that it is our great duty and concernment to use all diligence, watchfulness, and care, that we enter not into temptation; and I shall evince it by the ensuing considerations:—

1. In that *compendious* instruction given us by our Saviour concerning what we ought to pray for, this of not entering into temptation is expressly one head. Our Saviour knew of what concernment it was to us not to "enter into temptation," when he gave us this as one special subject of our daily dealing with God, Matt. vi. 13. And the order of the words shows us of what importance it is: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." If we are led into temptation, evil will befall us, more or less. How God may be said

Digitized by Google

to tempt us, or to "lead us into temptation," I showed before. In this direction, it is not so much the not *giving us up to it*, as the powerful *keeping us from it* that is intended. The last words are, as it were, exegetical, or expository of the former: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil;"—"So deal with us that we may be powerfully delivered from that evil which attends our entering into temptation." Our blessed Saviour knows full well our state and condition; he knows the power of temptations, having had experience of it, Heb. ii. 18; he knows our vain confidence, and the reserves we have concerning our ability to deal with temptations, as he found it in Peter; but he knows our weakness and folly, and how soon we are cast to the ground, and therefore doth he lay in this provision for instruction at the entrance of his ministry, to make us heedful, if possible, in that which is of so great concernment to us. If, then, we will repose any confidence in the wisdom, love, and care of Jesus Christ towards us, we must grant the truth pleaded for.

2. Christ promiseth this freedom and deliverance as a great *reward* of most acceptable obedience, Rev. iii. 10. This is the great promise made to the church of Philadelphia, wherein Christ found nothing that he would blame, "Thou shalt be kept from the hour of temptation." Not, "Thou shalt be preserved *in* it;" but he goes higher, "Thou shalt be kept *from* it." "There is," saith our Saviour, "an hour of temptation coming; a season that will make havoc in the world: multitudes shall then fall from the faith, deny and blaspheme me. Oh, how few will be able to stand and hold out! Some will be utterly destroyed, and perish for ever. Some will get wounds to their souls that shall never be well healed whilst they live in this world, and have their bones broken, so as to go halting all their days. But," saith he, "'because thou hast kept the word of my patience,' I will be tender towards thee, and 'keep thee from this hour of temptation.'" Certainly that which Christ thus promises to his beloved church, as a reward of her service, love, and obedience, is no light thing. Whatever Christ promiseth to his spouse is a fruit of unspeakable love; that is so in an especial manner which is promised as a reward of special obedience.

3. Let us to this purpose consider the general issues of men's entering into temptation, and that of bad and good men, of ungrounded professors, and of the choicest saints.

(1.) For the first I shall offer but one or two texts of Scripture. Luke viii. 13, "They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy, and have no root, but for a while believe." Well! how long do they believe? They are affected with the preaching of the word, and believe thereon, make profession, bring forth some fruits; but until when do they abide? Says he, "In the time

Digitized by Google

of temptation they fall away." When once they enter into temptation they are gone for ever. Temptation withers all their profession, and slays their souls. We see this accomplished every day. Men who have attended on the preaching of the gospel, been affected and delighted with it, that have made profession of it, and have been looked on, it may be, as believers, and thus have continued for some years; no sooner doth temptation befall them that hath vigour and permanency in it, but they are turned out of the way, and are gone for ever. They fall to hate the word they have delighted in, despise the professors of it, and are hardened by sin. So Matt. vii. 26, "He that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, is like unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand." But what doth this house of profession do? It shelters him, keeps him warm, and stands for a while. But saith he, verse 27, "When the rain descends, when temptation comes, it falls utterly, and its fall is great." Judas follows our Saviour three years, and all goes well with him: he no sooner enters into temptation, Satan hath got him and winnowed him, but he is gone. Demas will preach the gospel until the love of the world befall him, and he is utterly turned aside. It were endless to give instances of this. Entrance into temptation is, with this sort of men, an entrance into apostasy, more or less, in part or in whole; it faileth not.

(2.) For the *saints* of God themselves, let us see, by some instances, what issue they have had of their entering into temptation. I shall name a few:—

Adam was the "son of God," Luke iii. 38, created in the image of God, full of that integrity, righteousness, and holiness, which might be and was an eminent resemblance of the holiness of God. He had a far greater inherent stock of ability than we, and had nothing in him to entice or seduce him; yet this Adam no sooner enters into temptation but he is gone, lost, and ruined, he and all his posterity with him. What can we expect in the like condition, that have not only in our temptations, as he had, a *cunning devil* to deal withal, but a *cursed world* and a *corrupt heart* also?

Abraham was the father of the faithful, whose faith is proposed as a pattern to all them that shall believe; yet he, entering twice into the same temptation, namely, that of fear about his wife, was twice overpowered by it, to the dishonour of God, and no doubt the disquietment of his own soul, Gen. xii. 12, 13, xx. 2.

David is called a "man after God's own heart" by God himself; yet what a dreadful thing is the story of his entering into temptation! He is no sooner entangled, but he is plunged into adultery; thence seeking deliverance by his own invention, like a poor creature in a toil, he is entangled more and more, until he lies as one dead, under the power of sin and folly.

Digitized by Google

I might mention Noah, Lot, Hezekiah, Peter, and the rest, whose temptations and falls therein are on record for our instruction. Certainly he that hath any heart in these things cannot but say, as the inhabitants of Samaria upon the letter of Jehu, "'Behold, two kings stood not before him, how shall we stand?' O Lord, if such mighty pillars have been cast to the ground, such cedars blown down, how shall I stand before temptations? Oh, keep me that I enter not in!" "Vestigia terrent." Behold the footsteps of them that have gone in. Whom do you see retiring without a wound? a blemish at least? On this account would the apostle have us to exercise tenderness towards them that are fallen into sin: Gal vi. 1, "Considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." He doth not say, "Lest thou also sin, or fall, or be overtaken with a fault;" but, "Lest thou also be tempted." "Thou seest the power of temptation in others, and knowest not how soon thou mayst be tempted, nor what will be the state and condition of thy soul thereupon." Assuredly, he that hath seen so many better, stronger men than himself fail, and cast down in the trial, will think it incumbent on him to remember the battle, and, if it be possible, to come there no more. Is it not a madness for a man that can scarce crawl up and down, he is so weak (which is the case of most of us), if he avoid not what he hath seen giants foiled in the undertaking of? Thou art yet whole and sound; take heed of temptation, lest it be with thee as it was with Abraham, David, Lot, Peter, Hezekiah, the Galatians, who fell in the time of trial.

In nothing doth the folly of the hearts of men show itself more openly, in the days wherein we live, than in this cursed boldness, after so many warnings from God, and so many sad experiences every day under their eyes, of running into and putting themselves upon temptations. Any society, any company, any conditions of outward advantages, without once weighing what their strength, or what the concernment of their poor souls is, they are ready for. Though they go over the dead and the slain that in those ways and paths but even now fell down before them, yet they will go on without regard or trembling. At this door are gone out hundreds, thousands of professors, within a few years. But,—

4. Let us *consider ourselves*,—what our weakness is; and what temptation is,—its power and efficacy, with what it leads unto:—

(1.) For ourselves, we are *weakness* itself. We have no strength, no power to withstand. Confidence of any strength in us is one great part of our weakness; it was so in Peter. He that says he can do any thing, can do nothing as he should. And, which is worse, it is the worst kind of weakness that is in us,—a weakness from treachery,—a weakness arising from that party which every temptation hath in us. If a castle or fort be never so strong and well fortified, yet if

Digitized by Google

there be a treacherous party within, that is ready to betray it on every opportunity, there is no preserving it from the enemy. There are traitors in our hearts, ready to take part, to close, and side with every temptation, and to give up all to them; yea, to solicit and bribe temptations to do the work, as traitors incite an enemy. Do not flatter yourselves that you shall hold out; there are secret lusts that lie lurking in your hearts, which perhaps now stir not, which, as soon as any temptation befalls you, will rise, tumultuate, cry, disquiet, seduce, and never give over until they are either killed or satisfied. He that promises himself that the frame of his heart will be the same under a temptation as it is before will be wofully mistaken. "Am I a dog, that I should do this thing?" says Hazael. Yea, thou wilt be such a dog if ever thou be king of Syria; temptation from thy interest will unman thee. He that now abhors the thoughts of such and such a thing, if he once enters into temptation will find his heart inflamed towards it, and all contrary reasonings overborne and silenced. He will deride his former fears, cast out his scruples, and contemn the consideration that he lived upon. Little did Peter think he should deny and forswear his Master so soon as ever he was questioned whether he knew him or no. It was no better when the hour of temptation came; all resolutions were forgotten, all love to Christ buried; the present temptation closing with his carnal fear carried all before it.

To handle this a little more distinctly, I shall consider the means of safety from the power of temptation, if we enter therein, that may be expected from ourselves; and that in general as to the spring and rise of them, and in particular as to the ways of exerting that strength we have, or seem to have:—

[1.] In general, all we can look for is from our *hearts*. What a man's heart is, that is he; but now what is the heart of a man in such a season?

1*st*. Suppose a man is not a *believer*, but only a *professor* of the gospel, what can the heart of such a one do? Prov. x. 20, "The heart of the wicked is little worth;" and surely that which is little worth in any thing is not much worth in this. A wicked man may in outward things be of great use; but come to his heart, that is false and a thing of nought. Now, withstanding of temptation is heart-work; and when it comes like a flood, can such a rotten trifle as a wicked man's heart stand before it? But of these before. Entering into temptation and apostasy is the same with them.

2*dly*. Let it be whose heart it will, Prov. xxviii. 26, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool;" he that doth so, be he what he will, in that he is foolish. Peter did so in his temptation; he trusted in his own heart: "Though all men forsake thee, I will not." It was

Digitized by Google

his folly; but why was it his folly? He shall not be delivered; it will not preserve him in snares; it will not deliver him in temptations. The heart of a man will promise him very fair before a temptation comes. "Am I a dog," says Hazael, "that I should do this thing?" "Though all men should deny thee," [says Peter,] "I will not. Shall I do this evil? It cannot be." All the arguments that are suited to give check to the heart in such a condition are mustered up. Did not Peter, think you, do so? "What! deny my Master, the Son of God, my Redeemer, who loves me? Can such ingratitude, unbelief, rebellion, befall me? I will not do it." Shall, then, a man rest in it that his heart will be steadfast? Let the wise man answer: "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." "The heart is deceitful," Jer. xvii. 9. We would not willingly trust any thing wherein there is any deceit or guile; here is that which is "deceitful above all things." It hath a thousand shifts and treacheries that it will deal withal; when it comes to the trial, every temptation will steal it away, Hos. iv. 11. Generally men's hearts deceive them no oftener than they do trust in them, and then they never fail so to do.

[2.] Consider the particular ways and means that such a heart hath or can use to safeguard itself in the hour of temptation, and their insufficiency to that purpose will quickly appear. I shall instance in some few only:—

1*st*. Love of *honour* in the world. Reputation and esteem in the church, obtained by former profession and walking, is one of the heart's own weapons to defend itself in the hour of temptation. "Shall such a one as I fly? I who have had such a reputation in the church of God, shall I now lose it by giving way to this lust, to this temptation? by closing with this or that public evil?" This consideration hath such an influence on the spirits of some, that they think it will be a shield and buckler against any assaults that may befall them. They will die a thousand times before they will forfeit that repute they have in the church of God! But, alas! this is but a withe, or a new cord, to bind a giant temptation withal. What think you of the "third part of the stars of heaven?" Rev. xii. 4. Had they not shone in the firmament of the church? Were they not sensible, more than enough, of their own honour, height, usefulness, and reputation? But when the dragon comes with his temptations, he casts them down to the earth. Yea, great temptations will make men, who have not a better defence, insensibly fortify themselves against that dishonour and disreputation that their ways are attended withal. "Populus sibilet, at mihi plaudo." Do we not know instances yet living of some who have ventured on compliances with wicked men after the glory of a long and useful profession, and within a while, finding themselves cast down thereby from their reputation with the saints, have har-

Digitized by Google

dened themselves against it and ended in apostasy? as John xv. 6. This kept not Judas; it kept not Hymeneus nor Philetus; it kept not the stars of heaven; nor will it keep thee.

2*dly*. There is, on the other side, the consideration of *shame*, reproach, loss, and the like. This also men may put their trust in as a defence against temptations, and do not fear but to be safeguarded and preserved by it. They would not for the world bring that shame and reproach upon themselves that such and such miscarriages are attended withal! Now, besides that this consideration extends itself only to *open sins*, such as the world takes notice of and abhors, and so is of no use at all in such cases as wherein pretences and colours may be invented and used, nor in public temptations to loose and careless walking, like those of our days, nor in cases that may be disputable in themselves, though expressly sinful to the consciences of persons under temptations, nor in heart sins,—in all which and most other cases of temptation there are innumerable reliefs ready to be tendered unto the heart against this consideration; besides all this, I say, we see by experience how easily this cord is broken when once the heart begins to be entangled. Each corner of the land is full of examples to this purpose.

3*dly*. They have yet that which outweighs these lesser considerations,—namely, that they will not wound their own *consciences*, and disturb their peace, and bring themselves in danger of hell fire. This, surely, if any thing, will preserve men in the hour of temptation. They will not lavish away their peace, nor venture their souls by running on God and the thick bosses of his buckler! What can be of more efficacy and prevalency? I confess this is of great importance; and oh that it were more pondered than it is! that we laid more weight upon the preservation of our peace with God than we do! yet I say that even this consideration in him who is otherwhere off from his watch, and doth not make it his work to follow the other rules insisted on, it will not preserve him; for,—

(1*st*.) The peace of such a one may be *false peace* or security, made up of presumption and false hopes; yea, though he be a believer, it may be so. Such was David's peace after his sin, before Nathan came to him; such was Laodicea's peace when ready to perish; and Sardis her peace when dying. What should secure a soul that it is otherwise, seeing, it is supposed, that it doth not universally labour to keep the word of Christ's patience, and to be watchful in all things? Think you that the peace of many in these days will be found to be true peace at last? Nothing less. They go alive down to hell, and death will have dominion over them in the morning. Now, if a man's peace be such, do you think that can preserve him which cannot preserve itself? It will give way at the first vigor-

Digitized by Google

ous assault of a temptation in its height and hour. Like a broken reed, it will run into the hand of him that leaneth on it. But,—

(2*dly.*) Suppose the *peace* cared for, and proposed to safeguard the soul, be true and good, yet when all is laid up in this one bottom, when the hour of temptation comes, so many reliefs will be tendered against this consideration as will make it useless. "This evil is *small;* it is *questionable;* it falls not openly and downright upon *conscience.* I do but fear *consequences;* it may be I may keep my peace notwithstanding. Others of the people of God have fallen, and yet kept or recovered their peace. If it be lost for a season, it may be obtained again. I will not solicit its station any more; or though peace be lost, safety may remain." And a thousand such pleas there are, which are all planted as batteries against this fort, so that it cannot long hold out.

(3*dly.*) The fixing on this particular only is to make good one *passage* or entrance, whilst the enemy assaults us round about. It is true, a little armour would serve to defend a man if he might choose where his enemy should strike him; but we are commanded to take the "whole armour of God" if we intend to resist and stand, Eph. vi. This we speak of is but one piece; and when our eye is only to that, temptation may enter and prevail twenty other ways. For instance, a man may be tempted to worldliness, unjust gain, revenge, vainglory, or the like. If he fortify himself alone with this consideration, he will not do this thing, and wound his conscience and lose his peace; fixing his eye on this particular, and counting himself safe whilst he is not overcome on that hand, it may be neglect of private communion with God, sensuality, and the like, do creep in, and he is not one jot in a better condition than if he had fallen under the power of that part of the temptation which was most visibly pressing on him. Experience gives to see that this doth and will *fail* also. There is no saint of God but puts a valuation on the peace he hath; yet how many of them fail in the day of temptation!

(4*thly.*) But yet they have another consideration also, and that is, the vileness of sinning against God. How shall they do this thing, and sin against God, the God of their mercies, of their salvation? How shall they wound Jesus Christ, who died for them? This surely cannot but preserve them. I answer,—

First, We see every day this consideration failing also. There is no child of God that is overcome of temptation but overcomes this consideration. It is not, then, a sure and infallible defensative.

Secondly, This consideration is twofold: either it expresses the thoughts of the soul with particular reference to the temptation contended withal, and then it will not preserve it; or it expresses the universal, habitual frame of heart that is in us, upon all accounts,

Digitized by Google

and then it falleth in with what I shall tender as the universal medicine and remedy in this case in the process of this discourse; whereof afterward.

(2.) Consider *the power of temptation*, partly from what was showed before, from the *effects* and fruits of it in the saints of old, partly from such other effects in general as we find ascribed to it; as,—

[1.] It will *darken the mind*, that a man shall not be able to make a right judgment of things, so as he did before he entered into it. As in the men of the world, the god of this world blinds their minds that they should not see the glory of Christ in the gospel, 2 Cor. iv. 4, and "whoredom, and wine, and new wine, take away their hearts," Hos. iv. 11; so it is in the nature of every temptation, more or less, to take away the heart, or to darken the understanding of the person tempted.

And this it doth divers ways:—

1*st*. By *fixing* the imagination and the thoughts upon the *object* whereto it tends, so that the mind shall be diverted from the consideration of the things that would relieve and succour it in the state wherein it is. A man is tempted to apprehend that he is forsaken of God, that he is an object of his hatred, that he hath no interest in Christ. By the craft of Satan the mind shall be so *fixed* to the consideration of this state and condition, with the distress of it, that he shall not be able to manage any of the reliefs suggested and tendered to him against it; but, following the fulness of his own thoughts, shall walk on in darkness and have no light. I say, a temptation will so possess and fill the mind with thoughtfulness of itself and the matter of it, that it will take off from that clear consideration of things which otherwise it might and would have. And those things whereof the mind was wont to have a vigorous sense, to keep it from sin, will by this means come to have no force or efficacy with it; nay, it will commonly bring men to that state and condition, that when others, to whom their estate is known, are speaking to them the things that concern their deliverance and peace, their minds will be so possessed with the matter of their temptation as not at all to understand, scarce to hear one word, that is spoken to them.

2*dly*. By *woful entangling of the affections;* which, when they are engaged, what influence they have in blinding the mind and darkening the understanding is known. If any know it not, let him but open his eyes in these days, and he will quickly learn it. By what ways and means it is that engaged affections will becloud the mind and darken it I shall not now declare; only, I say, give me a man engaged in hope, love, fear, in reference to any particulars wherein he ought not, and I shall quickly show you wherein he is darkened and blinded. This, then, you will fail in if you enter into tempta-

Digitized by Google

tion:—The present judgment you have of things will not be utterly altered, but darkened and rendered infirm to influence the will and master the affections. These, being set at liberty by temptation, will run on in madness. Forthwith detestation of sin, abhorring of it, terrors of the Lord, sense of love, presence of Christ crucified, all depart, and leave the heart a prey to its enemy.

3*dly*. Temptation will give *oil and fuel* to our lusts,—incite, provoke, and make them tumultuate and rage beyond measure. Tendering a lust, a corruption, a suitable object, advantage, occasion, it heightens and exasperates it, makes it for a season wholly predominant: so dealt it with carnal fear in Peter, with pride in Hezekiah, with covetousness in Achan, with uncleanness in David, with worldliness in Demas, with ambition in Diotrephes. It will lay the reins on the neck of a lust, and put spurs to the sides of it, that it may rush forward like a horse into the battle. A man knows not the pride, fury, madness of a corruption, until it meet with a suitable temptation. And what now will a poor soul think to do? His mind is darkened, his affections entangled, his lusts inflamed and provoked, his relief is defeated; and what will be the issue of such a condition?

(3.) Consider that temptations are either *public or private;* and let us a little view the efficacy and power of them apart:—

[1.] There are public temptations; such as that mentioned, Rev. iii. 10, that was to come upon the world, "to try them that dwell upon the earth;" or a combination of persecution and seduction for the trial of a careless generation of professors. Now, concerning such a temptation, consider that,—

1*st*. It hath an *efficacy* in respect of God, who sends it to revenge the neglect and contempt of the gospel on the one hand, and treachery of false professors on the other. Hence it will certainly accomplish what it receives commission from him to do. When Satan offered his service to go forth and seduce Ahab that he might fall, God says to him, "Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so," 1 Kings xxii. 22. He is permitted as to his wickedness, and commissionated as to the event and punishment intended. When the Christian world was to be given up to folly and false worship for their neglect of the truth, and their naked, barren, fruitless, Christ-dishonouring profession, it is said of the temptation that fell upon them, that "God sent them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie," 2 Thess. ii. 11. That that comes so from God, in a *judiciary* manner, hath a power with it and shall prevail. That selfish, spiritually-slothful, careless, and worldly frame of spirit, which in these days hath infected almost the body of professors, if it have a commission from God to kill hypocrites, to wound negligent saints, to break their bones, and make them scandalous, that they may be

Digitized by Google

ashamed, shall it not have a power and efficacy so to do? What work hath the spirit of error made amongst us! Is it not from hence, that as some men delighted not to retain God in their hearts, so he hath "given them up to a reprobate mind," Rom. i. 28. A man would think it strange, yea, it is matter of amazement, to see persons of a sober spirit, pretending to great things in the ways of God, overcome, captivated, ensnared, destroyed by weak means, sottish opinions, foolish imaginations, such as a man would think it impossible that they should ever lay hold on sensible or rational men, much less on professors of the gospel. But that which God will have to be strong, let us not think weak. No strength but the strength of God can stand in the way of the weakest things of the world that are commissionated from God for any end or purpose whatever.

2dly. There is in such temptations the secret insinuation of *examples* in those that are accounted *godly* and are professors: Matt. xxiv. 12, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold," etc. The abounding of iniquity in some will insensibly cast water on the zeal and love of others, that by little and little it shall wax cold. Some begin to grow negligent, careless, worldly, wanton. They break the ice towards the pleasing of the flesh. At first others blame, judge them, perhaps reprove them. In a short space their love also waxes cold; and the brunt being over, they also conform to them, and are cast into the same mould with them. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Paul repeats this saying twice, 1 Cor. v. 6, and Gal. v. 9. He would have us take notice of it; and it is of the danger of the infection of the whole body, from the ill examples of some, whereof he speaks. We know how insensibly leaven proceedeth to give a savour to the whole; so it is termed a "root of bitterness" that "springeth up and defileth many," Heb. xii. 15. If one little piece of leaven, if one bitter root, may endanger the whole, how much more when there are many roots of that nature, and much leaven is scattered abroad! It is easy following a multitude to do evil, and saying "A conspiracy" to them to whom the people say "A conspiracy." Would any one have thought it possible that such and such professors, in our days, should have fallen into ways of self, of flesh, of the world? to play at cards, dice, revel, dance? to neglect family, closet duties? to be proud, haughty, ambitious, worldly, covetous, oppressive? or that they should be turned away after foolish, vain, ridiculous opinions, deserting the gospel of Christ? In which two lies the great temptation that is come on us, the inhabitants of this world, to try us. But doth not every man see that this is come to pass? And may we not see how it is come to pass? Some loose, empty professors, who had never more than a

Digitized by Google

form of godliness, when they had served their turn of that, began the way to them; then others began a little to comply, and to please the flesh in so doing. This, by little and little, hath reached even the top boughs and branches of our profession, until almost all flesh hath corrupted its way. And he that departeth from these iniquities makes his name a prey, if not his person.

3*dly.* Public temptations are usually accompanied with *strong reasons and pretences*, that are too hard for men, or at least insensibly prevail upon them to an undervaluation of the evil whereunto the temptation leads, to give strength to that complicated temptation which in these days hath even cast down the people of God from their excellency,—hath cut their locks, and made them become like other men. How full is the world of specious pretences and pleadings! As there is the liberty and freedom of Christians, delivered from a bondage frame, this is a door that, in my own observation, I have seen sundry going out at, into sensuality and apostasy; beginning at a light conversation, proceeding to a neglect of the Sabbath, public and private duties, ending in dissoluteness and profaneness. And then there is leaving of public things to Providence, being contented with what is;—things good in themselves, but disputed into wretched, carnal compliances, and the utter ruin of all zeal for God, the interest of Christ or his people in the world. These and the like considerations, joined with the ease and plenty, the greatness and promotion of professors, have so brought things about, that whereas we have by Providence shifted places with the men of the world, we have by sin shifted spirits with them also. We are like a plantation of men carried into a foreign country. In a short space they degenerate from the manners of the people from whence they came, and fall into that of the country whereunto they are brought; as if there were something in the soil and the air that transformed them. Give me leave a little to follow my similitude: He that should see the prevailing party of these nations, many of those in rule, power, favour, with all their adherents, and remember that they were a colony of Puritans,—whose habitation was "in a low place," as the prophet speaks of the city of God,—translated by a high hand to the mountains they now possess, cannot but wonder how soon they have forgot the customs, manners, ways, of their own old people, and are cast into the mould of them that went before them in the places whereunto they are translated. I speak of us all, especially of us who are amongst the lowest of the people, where perhaps this iniquity doth most abound. What were those before us that we are not? what did they that we do not? Prosperity hath slain the foolish and wounded the wise.

[2.] Suppose the temptation is private. This hath been spoken to before; I shall add two things:—

Digitized by Google

1*st.* Its *union and incorporation* with lust, whereby it gets within the soul, and lies at the bottom of its actings. John tells us, 1 Epist. ii. 16, that the things that are "in the world" are, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life." Now, it is evident that all these things are principally in the *subject*, not in the *object*,—in the *heart*, not in the *world*. But they are said to be "in the world," because the world gets into them, mixes itself with them, unites, incorporates. As faith and the promises are said to be "mixed," Heb. iv. 2, so are lust and temptation mixed: they twine together; receive mutual improvement from one another; grow each of them higher and higher by the mutual strength they administer to one another. Now, by this means temptation gets so deep in the heart that no contrary reasonings can reach unto it; nothing but what can kill the lust can conquer the temptation. Like leprosy that hath mingled itself with the wall, the wall itself must be pulled down, or the leprosy will not be cured. Like a gangrene that mixes poison with the blood and spirits, and cannot be separated from the place where it is, but both must be cut off together. For instance, in David's temptation to uncleanness, ten thousand considerations might have been taken in to stop the mouth of the temptation; but it had united itself with his lust, and nothing but the killing of that could destroy it, or get him the conquest. This deceives many a one. They have some pressing temptation, that, having got some advantages, is urgent upon them. They pray against it, oppose it with all powerful considerations, such as whereof every one seems sufficient to conquer and destroy it, at least to overpower it, that it should never be troublesome any more; but no good is done, no ground is got or obtained, yea, it grows upon them more and more. What is the reason of it? It hath incorporated and united itself with the lust, and is safe from all the opposition they make. If they would make work indeed, they are to set upon the whole of the lust itself; their ambition, pride, worldliness, sensuality, or whatever it be, that the temptation is united with. All other dealings with it are like tamperings with a prevailing gangrene: the part or whole may be preserved a little while, in great torment; excision or death must come at last. The soul may cruciate itself for a season with such a procedure; but it must come to this,—its lust must die, or the soul must die.

2*dly.* In what part soever of the soul the lust be seated wherewith the temptation is united, it draws after it *the whole soul* by one means or other, and so prevents or anticipates any opposition. Suppose it be a lust of the mind,—as there are lusts of the mind and uncleanness of the spirit, such as ambition, vain-glory, and the like,—what a world of ways hath the understanding to bridle the affections that they should not so tenaciously cleave to God, seeing

Digitized by Google

in what it aimeth at there is so much to give them contentment and satisfaction! It will not only prevent all the reasonings of the mind, which it doth necessarily,—being like a bloody infirmity in the eyes, presenting all things to the common sense and perception in that hue and colour,—but it will draw the whole soul, on other accounts and collateral considerations, into the same frame. It promises the whole a share in the spoil aimed at; as Judas's money, that he first desired from covetousness, was to be shared among all his lusts. Or be it in the more sensual part, and first possesseth the affections,—what prejudices they will bring upon the understanding, how they will bribe it to an acquiescence, what arguments, what hopes they will supply it withal, cannot easily be expressed, as was before showed. In brief, there is no particular temptation, but, when it is in its hour, it hath such a contribution of assistance from things good, evil, indifferent, is fed by so many considerations that seem to be most alien and foreign to it, in some cases hath such specious pleas and pretences, that its strength will easily be acknowledged.

(4.) Consider the end of any temptation; this is Satan's end and sin's end,—that is, the dishonour of God and the ruin of our souls.

(5.) Consider what hath been the *issue* of any former temptations that thou hast had. Have they not defiled thy conscience, disquieted thy peace, weakened thee in thy obedience, clouded the face of God? Though thou wast not prevailed on to the outward evil or utmost issue of thy temptation, yet hast thou not been foiled? hath not thy soul been sullied and grievously perplexed with it? yea, didst thou ever in thy life come fairly off, without sensible loss, from any temptation almost that thou hadst to deal withal; and wouldst thou willingly be entangled again? If thou art at liberty, take heed; enter no more, if it be possible, lest a worse thing happen to thee.

These, I say, are some of those many considerations that might be insisted on, to manifest the importance of the truth proposed, and the fulness of our concernment in taking care that we "enter not into temptation."

Against what hath been spoken, some objections that secretly insinuate themselves into the souls of men, and have an efficacy to make them negligent and careless in this thing, which is of such importance to them,—a duty of such indispensable necessity to them who intend to walk with God in any peace, or with any faithfulness,—are to be considered and removed. And they are these that follow:—

Obj. 1. "Why should we so fear and labour to avoid temptation? James i. 2, we are commanded to 'count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations.' Now, certainly I need not solicitously avoid the falling into that which, when I am fallen into, I am to count it all joy." To which I answer,—

Digitized by Google

1. You will not hold by this rule in all things,—namely, that a man need not seek to avoid that which, when he cannot but fall into, it is his duty to rejoice therein. The same apostle bids the rich "rejoice that they are made low," chap. i. 10. And, without doubt, to him who is acquainted with the goodness, and wisdom, and love of God in his dispensations, in every condition that is needful for him, it will be a matter of rejoicing to him: but yet, how few rich, godly men can you persuade not to take heed, and use all lawful means that they be not made poor and low! and, in most cases, the truth is, it were their sin not to do so. It is our business to make good our stations, and to secure ourselves as we can; if God alter our condition we are to rejoice in it. If the temptations here mentioned befall us, we may have cause to rejoice; but not if, by a neglect of duty, we fall into them.

2. Temptations are taken *two ways:*—

(1.) Passively and merely *materially*, for such things as are, or in some cases may be, temptations; or,—

(2.) *Actively*, for such as do entice to sin. James speaks of temptations in the first sense only; for having said, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations," verse 2; he adds, verse 12, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life." But now whereas a man might say, "If this be so, then temptations are good, and from God;"—"No," says James; "take temptation in such a sense as that it is a thing enticing and leading to sin, so God tempts none; but every man is tempted of his own lust," verses 13, 14. "To have such temptations, to be tempted to sin, that is not the blessed thing I intend; but the enduring of afflictions that God sends for the trial of our faith, that is a blessed thing. So that, though I must count it all joy when, through the will of God, I fall into divers afflictions for my trial, which yet have the matter of temptation in them, yet I am to use all care and diligence that my lust have no occasions or advantages given unto it to tempt me to sin."

Obj. 2. "But was not our Saviour Christ himself tempted; and is it evil to be brought into the same state and condition with him? Yea, it is not only said that he was tempted, but his being so is expressed as a thing advantageous, and conducing to his mercifulness as our priest: Heb. ii. 17, 18, 'In that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.' And he makes it a ground of a great promise to his disciples, that they had 'abode with him in his temptations,' Luke xxii. 28."

Ans. It is true, our Saviour was tempted; but yet his temptations are reckoned among the *evils* that befell him in the days of his flesh, —things that came on him through the malice of the world and the

Digitized by Google

prince thereof. He did not wilfully cast himself into temptation, which he said was "to tempt the Lord our God," Matt. iv. 7; as, indeed, willingly to enter into any temptation is highly to tempt God. Now, our condition is so, that, use the greatest diligence and watchfulness that we can, yet we shall be sure to be tempted, and be made like to Christ therein. This hinders not but that it is our duty to the utmost to prevent our falling into them; and that namely on this account:—Christ had only the *suffering* part of temptation when he entered into it; we have also the *sinning* part of it. When the prince of this world came to Christ, he had "no part in him;" but when he comes to us, he hath so in us. So that though in one effect of temptations, namely, trials and disquietness, we are made like to Christ, and so are to rejoice as far as by any means that is produced; yet by another we are made unlike to him,—which is our being defiled and entangled: and are therefore to seek by all means to avoid them. We never come off like Christ. Who of us "enter into temptation" and are not defiled?

Obj. 3. "But what need this great endeavour and carefulness? Is it not said that 'God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape?' 1 Cor. x. 13; and, 'He knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations,' 2 Pet. ii. 9. What need we, then, be solicitous that we enter not into them?"

Ans. I much question what assistance he will have from God in his temptation who willingly enters into it, because he supposes God hath promised to deliver him out of it. The Lord knows that, through the craft of Satan, the subtlety and malice of the world, the deceitfulness of sin, that doth so easily beset us, when we have done our utmost, yet we shall enter into divers temptations. In his love, care, tenderness, and faithfulness, he hath provided such a sufficiency of grace for us, that they shall not utterly prevail to make an everlasting separation between him and our souls. Yet I have three things to say to this objection:—

(1.) He that *wilfully* or negligently enters into temptation hath no reason in the world to promise himself any assistance from God, or any deliverance from the temptation whereunto he is entered. The promise is made to them whom temptations do befall in their way, whether they will or not; not them that wilfully fall into them,—that run out of their way to meet with them. And therefore the devil (as is usually observed), when he tempted our Saviour, left out that expression of the text of Scripture, which he wrested to his purpose, "All thy ways." The promise of deliverance is to them who are in their ways; whereof this is one principal, to beware of temptation.

(2.) Though there be a sufficiency of grace provided for all the

Digitized by Google

elect, that they shall by no temptation fall utterly from God, yet it would make any gracious heart to tremble, to think what dishonour to God, what scandal to the gospel, what woful darkness and disquietness they may bring upon their own souls, though they perish not. And they who are scared by nothing but fear of hell, on whom other considerations short thereof have no influence, in my apprehension have more reason to fear it than perhaps they are aware of.

(3.) To enter on temptation on this account is to venture on sin (which is the same with "continuing in sin") "that grace may abound," Rom. vi. 1, 2; which the apostle rejects the thoughts of with greatest detestation. Is it not a madness, for a man willingly to suffer the ship wherein he is to split itself on a rock, to the irrecoverable loss of his merchandise, because he supposes he shall in his own person swim safely to shore on a plank? Is it less in him who will hazard the shipwreck of all his comfort, peace, joy, and so much of the glory of God and honour of the gospel as he is intrusted with, merely on supposition that his soul shall yet escape? These things a man would think did not deserve to be mentioned, and yet with such as these do poor souls sometimes delude themselves.

CHAPTER IV

Particular cases proposed to consideration—The first, its resolution in sundry particulars—Several discoveries of the state of a soul entering into temptation.

THESE things being premised in general, I proceed to the consideration of *three particular cases arising* from the truth proposed: the first whereof relates unto the *thing* itself; the second unto the *time* or season thereof; and the last unto our *deportment* in reference unto the prevention of the evil treated of.

First, then, it may be inquired,—1. *How a man may know when he is entered into temptation.* 2. *What directions are to be given for the preventing of our entering into temptation.* 3. *What seasons there are wherein a man may and ought to fear that an hour of temptation is at hand.*

1. How shall a man know whether he be entered into temptation or no, is our first inquiry. I say, then,—

(1.) When a *man is drawn into any sin*, he may be sure that he hath entered into temptation. All *sin* is from temptation, James i. 14. Sin is a fruit that comes only from that root. Though a man be never so suddenly or violently surprised in or with any sin, yet it

Digitized by Google

is from some temptation or other that he hath been so surprised: so the apostle, Gal. vi. 1. If a man be surprised, overtaken with a fault, yet he was tempted to it; for says he, "Consider thyself, lest thou also be tempted,"—that is, as he was when he was so surprised, as it were, at unawares. This men sometimes take no notice of, to their great disadvantage. When they are overtaken with a sin they set themselves to repent of that sin, but do not consider the temptation that was the cause of it, to set themselves against that also, to take care that they enter no more into it. Hence are they quickly again entangled by it, though they have the greatest detestation of the sin itself that can be expressed. He that would indeed get the conquest over any sin must consider his temptations to it, and strike at that root; without deliverance from thence, he will not be healed.

This is a folly that possesses many who have yet a quick and living sense of sin. They are sensible of their *sins*, not of their *temptations*, —are displeased with the bitter fruit, but cherish the poisonous root. Hence, in the midst of their humiliations for sin, they will continue in those ways, those societies, in the pursuit of those ends, which have occasioned that sin; of which more afterward.

(2.) Temptations have *several degrees*. Some arise to such an height, do so press on the soul, so cruciate and disquiet it, so fight against all opposition that is made to it, that it must needs be past all doubt, to him who is so assaulted, that it is a peculiar power of temptation that he is to wrestle withal. When a fever rages, a man knows he is sick, unless his distemper have made him mad. The lusts of men, as James tells us, "entice, draw away," and seduce them to sin; but this they do of themselves, without peculiar instigation, in a more quiet, even, and sedate manner. If they grow violent, if they hurry the soul up and down, give it no rest, the soul may know that they have got the help of temptation to their assistance.

Take an empty vessel and put it into some stream that is in its course to the sea, it will infallibly be carried thither, according to the course and speed of the stream; but let strong winds arise upon it, it will be driven with violence on every bank and rock, until, being broken in pieces, it is swallowed up of the ocean. Men's lusts will infallibly (if not mortified in the death of Christ) carry them into eternal ruin, but oftentimes without much noise, according to the course of the stream of their corruptions; but let the wind of strong temptations befall them, they are hurried into innumerable scandalous sins, and so, broken upon all accounts, are swallowed up in eternity. So is it in general with men; so in particular. Hezekiah had the root of *pride* in him always; yet it did not make him run up and down to show his treasure and his riches until he fell into temptation by the ambassadors of the king of Babylon. So had David;

Digitized by Google

yet could he keep off from numbering the people until Satan stood up and provoked him, and solicited him to do it. Judas was covetous from the beginning; yet he did not contrive to satisfy it by selling of his Master until the devil entered into him, and he thereby into temptation. The like may be said of Abraham, Jonah, Peter, and the rest. So that when any lust or corruption whatever tumultuates and disquieteth the soul, puts it with violence on sin, let the soul know that it hath got the advantage of some outward temptation, though as yet it perceiveth not wherein, or at least is become itself a peculiar temptation by some incitation or provocation that hath befallen it, and is to be looked to more than ordinarily.

(3.) Entering into temptation may be seen in the lesser degrees of it; as, for instance, when the heart begins secretly to *like the matter of the temptation*, and is content to feed it and increase it by any ways that it may without downright sin.

In particular, a man begins to be in repute for piety, wisdom, learning, or the like,—he is spoken of much to that purpose; his heart is tickled to hear of it, and his pride and ambition affected with it. If this man now, with all his strength, ply the things from whence his repute, and esteem, and glory amongst men do spring, with a secret eye to have it increased, he is entering into temptation; which, if he take not heed, will quickly render him a slave of lust. So was it with Jehu. He perceived that his repute for zeal began to grow abroad, and he got honour by it. Jonadab comes in his way, a good and holy man. "Now," thinks Jehu, "I have an opportunity to grow in honour of my zeal." So he calls Jonadab to him, and to work he goes most seriously. The things he did were good in themselves, but he was entered into temptation, and served his lust in all that he did. So is it with many scholars. They find themselves esteemed and favoured for their learning. This takes hold of the pride and ambition of their hearts. Hence they set themselves to study with all diligence day and night,—a thing good in itself; but they do it that they might satisfy the thoughts and words of men, wherein they delight: and so in all they do they make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.

It is true, God oftentimes brings light out of this darkness, and turns things to a better issue. After, it may be, a man hath studied sundry years, with an eye upon his lusts,—his ambition, pride, and vain-glory,—rising early and going to bed late, to give them satisfaction, God comes in with his grace, turns the soul to himself, robs those Egyptian lusts, and so consecrates that to the use of the tabernacle which was provided for idols.

Men may be thus entangled in better things than learning, even in the *profession* of piety, in their labour in the ministry, and the

Digitized by Google

like. Some men's profession is a snare to them. They are in reputation, and are much honoured on the account of their profession and strict walking. This often falls out in the days wherein we live, wherein all things are carried by parties. Some find themselves on the accounts mentioned, perhaps, to be the darlings and "ingentia decora," or glory of their party. If thoughts hereof secretly insinuate themselves into their hearts, and influence them into more than ordinary diligence and activity in their way and profession, they are entangled; and instead of aiming at more glory, had need lie in the dust, in a sense of their own vileness. And so close is this temptation, that oftentimes it requires no food to feed upon but that he who is entangled with it do avoid all means and ways of honour and reputation; so that it can but whisper in the heart that that avoidance is honourable. The same may be the condition with men, as was said, in *preaching the gospel*, in the work of the ministry. Many things in that work may yield them esteem,—their ability, their plainness, their frequency, their success; and all in this sense may be fuel unto temptations. Let, then, a man know that when he likes that which feeds his lust, and keeps it up by ways either good in themselves or not downright sinful, he is entered into temptation.

(4.) When by a man's state or condition of life, or any means whatever, it comes to pass that his lust and any temptation meet with occasions and opportunities for its provocation and stirring up, let that man know, whether he perceive it or not, that he is certainly entered into temptation. I told you before, that to enter into temptation is not merely to be tempted, but so to be under the *power* of it as to be entangled by it. Now, it is impossible almost for a man to have opportunities, occasions, advantages, suited to his lust and corruption, but he will be entangled. If ambassadors come from the king of Babylon, Hezekiah's pride will cast him into temptation. If Hazael be king of Syria, his cruelty and ambition will make him to rage savagely against Israel. If the priests come with their pieces of silver, Judas's covetousness will instantly be at work to sell his Master. And many instances of the like kind may, in the days wherein we live, be given. Some men think to play on the hole of the asp and not be stung, to touch pitch and not be defiled, to take fire in their clothes and not be burnt; but they will be mistaken. If thy business, course of life, societies, or whatever else it be of the like kind, do cast thee on such things, ways, persons, as suit thy lust or corruption, know that thou art entered into temptation; how thou wilt come out God only knows. Let us suppose a man that hath any seeds of filthiness in his heart engaged, in the course of his life, in society, light, vain, and foolish, what notice soever, little, great, or none at all, it be that he takes of it, he is undoubtedly entered into

Digitized by Google

temptation. So is it with ambition in high places; passion in a multitude of perplexing affairs; polluted corrupt fancy in vain societies, and the perusal of idle books or treatises of vanity and folly. Fire and things combustible may more easily be induced to lie together without affecting each other, than *peculiar* lusts and *suitable* objects or occasions for their exercise.

(5.) When a man is *weakened*, made *negligent* or *formal* in duty, when he can omit duties or content himself with a careless, lifeless performance of them, without delight, joy, or satisfaction to his soul, who had another frame formerly; let him know, that though he may not be acquainted with the particular distemper wherein it consists, yet in something or other he is entered into temptation, which at the length he will find evident, to his trouble and peril. How many have we seen and known in our days, who, from a warm profession, have fallen to be negligent, careless, indifferent in praying, reading, hearing, and the like! Give an instance of one who hath come off without a wound, and I dare say you may find out a hundred for him that have manifested themselves to have been asleep on the top of the mast; that they were in the jaws of some vile temptation or other, that afterward brought forth bitter fruit in their lives and ways. From some few returners from folly we have every day these doleful complaints made: "Oh! I neglected private prayer; I did not meditate on the word, nor attend to hearing, but rather despised these things: and yet said I was rich and wanted nothing. Little did I consider that this unclean lust was ripening in my heart; this atheism, these abominations were fomenting there." This is a certain rule:—If his heart grow cold, negligent, or formal in duties of the worship of God, and that either as to the matter or manner of them, who hath had another frame, one temptation or other hath laid hold upon him. World, or pride, or uncleanness, or self-seeking, or malice and envy, or one thing or other, hath possessed his spirit; *gray hairs are here and there upon him*, though he perceive it not. And this is to be observed as to the manner of duties, as well as to the matter. Men may, upon many sinister accounts, especially for the satisfaction of their consciences, keep up and frequent duties of religion, as to the substance and matter of them, when they have no heart to them, no life in them, as to the spirituality required in their performance. Sardis kept up the performance of duties, and had therefore a name to live; but wanted spiritual life in their performances, and was therefore "dead," Rev. iii. 1. As it is in distempers of the body, if a man find his spirits faint, his heart oppressed, his head heavy, the whole person indisposed, though he do not yet actually burn nor rave, yet he will cry, "I fear I am entering into a fever, I am so out of order and indisposed;"—a man may do so in this sickness of the

Digitized by Google

soul. If he find his pulse not beat aright and evenly towards duties of worship and communion with God,—if his spirit be low, and his heart faint in them,—let him conclude, though his lust do not yet burn nor rage, that he is entered into temptation, and it is high time for him to consider the particular causes of his distemper. If the head be heavy and slumber in the things of grace, if the heart be cold in duties, evil lies at the door. And if such a soul do escape a great temptation unto sin, yet it shall not escape a great temptation by desertion. The spouse cries, "I sleep," Cant. v. 2; and that she had "put off her coat, and could not put it on;"—had an indisposition to duties and communion with Christ. What is the next news you have of her? Verse 6, Her "Beloved had withdrawn himself,"—Christ was gone; and she seeks him long and finds him not. There is such a suitableness between the new nature that is wrought and created in believers, and the duties of the worship of God, that they will not be parted nor kept asunder, unless it be by the interposition of some disturbing distemper. The new creature feeds upon them, is strengthened and increased by them, finds sweetness in them, yea, meets in them with its God and Father; so that it cannot but of itself, unless made sick by some temptation, delight in them, and desire to be in the exercise of them. This frame is described in the 119th Psalm throughout. It is not, I say, cast out of this frame and temper unless it be oppressed and disordered by one secret temptation or other. Sundry other evidences there are of a soul's entering into temptation, which upon inquiry it may discover.

I propose this to take off the *security* that we are apt to fall into, and to manifest what is the peculiar duty that we are to apply ourselves unto in the special seasons of temptation; for he that is already entered into temptation is to apply himself unto means for disentanglement, not to labour to prevent his entering in. How this may be done I shall afterward declare.

CHAPTER V.

The second case proposed, or inquiries resolved—What are the best directions to prevent entering into temptation—Those directions laid down—The directions given by our Saviour: "Watch and pray"—What is included therein—(1.) Sense of the danger of temptation—(2.) That it is not in our power to keep ourselves—(3.) Faith in promises of preservation—Of prayer in particular.

2. HAVING seen the danger of entering into temptation, and also discovered the ways and seasons whereby and wherein men usually do so, our second inquiry is, What general directions may be given to

Digitized by Google

preserve a soul from that condition that hath been spoken of? And we see our Saviour's direction in the place spoken of before, Matt. xxvi. 41. He sums up all in these two words, "Watch and pray." I shall a little labour to unfold them, and show what is inwrapped and contained in them; and that both jointly and severally:—

(1.) There is included in them a clear, *abiding apprehension of the great evil* that there is in entering into temptation. That which a man watches and prays against, he looks upon as evil to him, and by all means to be avoided.

This, then, is the *first* direction:—*Always bear in mind the great danger that it is for any soul to enter into temptation.*

It is a woful thing to consider what slight thoughts the most have of this thing. So men can keep themselves from sin itself in open action, they are content, they scarce aim at more; on any temptation in the world, all sorts of men will venture at any time. How will young men put themselves on any company, any society; at first, being delighted with *evil company*, then with the *evil of the company!* How vain are all admonitions and exhortations to them to take heed of such persons, debauched in themselves, corrupters of others, destroyers of souls! At first they will venture on the company, abhorring the thoughts of practising their lewdness; but what is the issue? Unless it be here or there one, whom God snatches with a mighty hand from the jaws of destruction, they are all lost, and become after a while in love with the evil which at first they abhorred. This open door to the ruin of souls is too evident; and woful experience makes it no less evident that it is almost impossible to fasten upon many poor creatures any fear or dread of temptation, who yet will profess a fear and abhorrency of sin. Would it were only thus with young men, such as are unaccustomed to the yoke of the Lord! What sort of men is free from this folly in one thing or other? How many professors have I known that would plead for their *liberty*, as they called it! They could hear any thing, all things,—all sorts of men, all men; they would try all things whether they came to them in the way of God or no; and on that account would run to hear and to attend to every broacher of false and abominable opinions, every seducer, though stigmatized by the generality of the saints: for such a one they had their liberty,—they could do it; but the opinions they hated as much as any. What hath been the issue? I scarce ever knew any come off without a wound; the most have had their faith overthrown. Let no man, then, pretend to fear sin that doth not fear temptation to it. They are too nearly allied to be separated. Satan hath put them so together that it is very hard for any man to put them asunder. He hates not the fruit who delights in the root.

Digitized by Google

When men see that such ways, such companies, such *courses*, such businesses, such studies and *aims*, do entangle them, make them cold, careless, are quench-coals to them, indispose them to even, universal, and constant obedience, if they adventure on them, sin lies at the door. It is a tender frame of spirit, sensible of its own weakness and corruption, of the craft of Satan, of the evil of sin, of the efficacy of temptation, that can perform his duty. And yet until we bring our hearts to this frame, upon the considerations before-mentioned, or the like that may be proposed, we shall never free ourselves from sinful entanglements. Boldness upon temptation, springing from several pretences, hath, as is known, ruined innumerable professors in these days, and still continues to cast many down from their excellency; nor have I the least hope of a more fruitful profession amongst us until I see more fear of temptation. Sin will not long seem great or heavy unto any to whom temptations seem light or small.

This is the first thing inwrapped in this general direction:—The daily exercise of our thoughts with an apprehension of the great danger that lies in entering into temptation, is required of us. Grief of the Spirit of God, disquietment of our own souls, loss of peace, hazard of eternal welfare, lies at the door. If the soul be not prevailed withal to the observation of this direction, all that ensues will be of no value. Temptation despised will conquer; and if the heart be made tender and watchful here, half the work of securing a good conversation is over. And let not him go any further who resolves not to improve this direction in a daily conscientious observation of it.

(2.) There is this in it also, that it is *not a thing in our own power*, to keep and preserve ourselves from entering into temptation. Therefore are we to pray that we may be preserved from it, because we cannot save ourselves.

This is another means of preservation. As we have no strength to resist a temptation when it doth come, when we are entered into it, but shall fall under it, without a supply of sufficiency of grace from God; so to reckon that we have no power or wisdom to keep ourselves from entering into temptation, but must be kept by the power and wisdom of God, is a preserving principle, 1 Pet. i. 5. We are in all things "kept by the power of God." This our Saviour instructs us in, not only by directing us to pray that we be not led into temptation, but also by his own praying for us, that we may be kept from it: John xvii. 15, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil,"—that is, the temptations of the world unto evil, unto sin,—ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ, "out of the evil" that is in the world, that is temptation, which is all that is evil in the world; or from the evil one, who

Digitized by Google

in the world makes use of the world unto temptation. Christ prays his Father to keep us, and instructs us to pray that we be so kept. It is not, then, a thing in our own power. The ways of our entering into temptation are so many, various, and imperceptible,—the means of it so efficacious and powerful,—the entrances of it so deceitful, subtle, insensible, and plausible,—our weakness, our unwatchfulness, so unspeakable,—that we cannot in the least keep or preserve ourselves from it. We fail both in wisdom and power for this work.

Let the heart, then, commune with itself and say, "*I* am poor and weak; *Satan* is subtile, cunning, powerful, watching constantly for advantages against my soul; the *world* earnest, pressing, and full of specious pleas, innumerable pretences, and ways of deceit; my *own corruption* violent and tumultuating, enticing, entangling, conceiving sin, and warring in me, against me; *occasions* and advantages of temptation innumerable in all things I have done or suffer, in all businesses and persons with whom I converse; the *first beginnings* of temptation insensible and plausible, so that, left unto myself, I shall not know that I am ensnared, until my bonds be made strong, and sin hath got ground in my heart: therefore on God alone will I rely for preservation, and continually will I look up to him on that account." This will make the soul be always committing itself to the care of God, resting itself on him, and to do nothing, undertake nothing, etc., without asking counsel of him. So that a double advantage will arise from the observation of this direction, both of singular use for the soul's preservation from the evil feared:—

[1.] The engagement of the grace and compassion of God, who hath called the *fatherless* and *helpless* to rest upon him; nor did ever soul fail of supplies, who, in a sense of want, rolled itself on him, on the account of his gracious invitation.

[2.] The *keeping* of it in such a frame as, on various accounts, is useful for its preservation. He that looks to God for assistance in a due manner is both sensible of his danger, and conscientiously careful in the use of means to preserve himself: which two, of what importance they are in this case, may easily be apprehended by them who have their hearts exercised in these things.

[3.] This also is in it,—act *faith* on the *promise* of God for preservation. To believe that he will preserve us is a means of preservation; for this God will certainly do, or make a way for us to escape out of temptation, if we fall into it under such a believing frame. We are to pray for what God hath promised. Our requests are to be regulated by his promises and commands, which are of the same extent. Faith closes with the promises, and so finds relief in this case. This James instructs us in, chap. i. 5–7. What we want we must "ask of God;" but we must "ask in faith," for otherwise we must not "think

Digitized by Google

that we shall receive any thing of the Lord." This then, also, is in this direction of our Saviour, that we act faith on the promises of God for our preservation out of temptation. He hath promised that he will keep us in all our ways; that we shall be directed in a way that, though we are fools, "we shall not err therein," Isa. xxxv. 8; that he will lead us, guide us, and deliver us from the evil one. Set faith on work on these promises of God, and expect a good and comfortable issue. It is not easily conceived what a train of graces faith is attended withal, when it goes forth to meet Christ in the promises, nor what a power for the preservation of the soul lies in this thing; but I have spoken to this elsewhere.[1]

4. Weigh these things *severally*, and, first, take prayer into consideration. To pray that we enter not into temptation is a means to preserve us from it. Glorious things are, by all men that know aught of those things, spoken of this *duty;* and yet the truth is, not one half of its excellency, power, and efficacy is known. It is not my business to speak of it in general; but this I say as to my present purpose,—he that would be little in temptation, let him be much in prayer. This calls in the suitable help and succour that is laid up in Christ for us, Heb. iv. 16. This casteth our souls into a frame of opposition to every temptation. When Paul had given instruction for the taking to ourselves "the whole armour of God," that we may resist and stand in the time of temptation, he adds this general close of the whole, Eph. vi. 18, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication."

Without this all the rest will be of no efficacy for the end proposed. And therefore consider what weight he lays on it: "Praying always," —that is, at all times and seasons, or be always ready and prepared for the discharge of that duty, Luke xviii. 1, Eph. vi. 18; "with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,"—putting forth all kinds of desires unto God, that are suited to our condition, according to his will, and which we are assisted in by the Spirit; "and watching thereunto," lest we be diverted by any thing whatever; and that not for a little while, but "with all perseverance,"—continuance lengthened out to the utmost: so shall we stand. The soul so framed is in a sure posture; and this is one of the means without which this work will not be done. If we do not abide in prayer, we shall abide in cursed temptations. Let this, then, be another direction:—Abide in prayer, and that expressly to this purpose, that we "enter not into temptation." Let this be one part of our daily contending with God,—that he would preserve our souls, and keep our hearts and our ways, that we be not entangled; that his good and wise providence will order our ways

[1] Mortification of Sin in Believers, vol. vi. chap. xiv. p. 78.

Digitized by Google

and affairs, that no pressing temptation befall us; that he would give us diligence, carefulness, and watchfulness over our own ways. So shall we be delivered when others are held with the cords of their own folly.

CHAPTER VI.

Of watching that we enter not into temptation—The nature and efficacy of that duty—The first part of it, as to the special seasons of temptation—The first season, in unusual prosperity—The second, in a slumber of grace—Third, a season of great spiritual enjoyment—The fourth, a season of self-confidence.

THE other part of our Saviour's direction,—namely, to "watch,"—is more general, and extends itself to many particulars. I shall fix on some things that are contained therein:—

3. Watch the *seasons* wherein men usually do "enter into temptation."

There are sundry seasons wherein an hour of temptation is commonly at hand, and will unavoidably seize upon the soul, unless it be delivered by mercy in the use of watchfulness. When we are under such a season, then are we peculiarly to be upon our guard that we enter not into, that we fall not under, the power of temptation. Some of those seasons may be named:—

(1.) A season of *unusual outward prosperity* is usually accompanied with an hour of temptation. Prosperity and temptation go together; yea, prosperity is a temptation, many temptations, and that because, without eminent supplies of grace, it is apt to cast a soul into a frame and temper exposed to any temptation, and provides it with fuel and food for all. It hath provision for lust and darts for Satan.

The wise man tells us that the "prosperity of fools destroys them," Prov. i. 32. It *hardens* them in their way, makes them despise instruction, and put the evil day (whose terror should influence them into amendment) far from them. Without a special assistance, it hath an inconceivably malignant influence on believers themselves. Hence Agur prays against riches, because of the temptation that attends them: "Lest," saith he, "I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD?" Prov. xxx. 8, 9;—lest, being filled with them, he should forget the Lord; as God complains that his people did, Hos. xiii. 6. We know how David was mistaken in this case: Ps. xxx. 6, "I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved." All is well, and will be well. But what was at hand, what lay at the door, that David thought not of? Verse 7, "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was

Digitized by Google

troubled." God was ready to hide his face, and David to enter into a temptation of desertion, and he knew it not.

As, then, unto a *prosperous* condition. I shall not run cross to Solomon's counsel, "In the day of prosperity rejoice," Eccles. vii. 14. Rejoice in the God of thy mercies, who doth thee good in his patience and forbearance, notwithstanding all thy unworthiness. Yet I may add to it, from the same fountain of wisdom, "Consider," also, lest evil lie at the door. A man in that state is in the midst of snares. Satan hath many advantages against him; he forgeth darts out of all his enjoyments; and, if he watch not, he will be entangled before he is aware.

Thou wantest that which should poise and ballast thy heart. Formality in religion will be apt to creep upon thee; and that lays the soul open to all temptations in their full power and strength. Satisfaction and delight in creature-comforts, the poison of the soul, will be apt to grow upon thee. In such a time be vigilant, be circumspect, or thou wilt be surprised. Job says, that in his affliction "God made his heart soft," chap. xxiii. 16. There is a hardness, an insensible want of spiritual sense, gathered in prosperity, that, if not watched against, will expose the heart to the deceits of sin and baits of Satan. "Watch and pray" in this season. Many men's negligence in it hath cost them dear; their woful experience cries out to take heed. Blessed is he that feareth always, but especially in a time of prosperity.

(2.) As in part was manifested before, a time of *the slumber of grace*, of neglect in communion with God, of formality in duty, is a season to be watched in, as that which hath certainly some other temptation attending it.

Let a soul in such an estate awake and look about him. His enemy is at hand, and he is ready to fall into such a condition as may cost him dear all the days of his life. His present estate is bad enough in itself; but it is an indication of that which is worse that lies at the door. The disciples that were with Christ in the mount had not only a bodily, but a spiritual drowsiness upon them. What says our Saviour to them? "Arise; watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." We know how near one of them was to a bitter hour of temptation, and not watching as he ought, he immediately entered into it.

I mentioned before the case of the spouse, Cant. v. 2–8. She slept, and was drowsy, and unwilling to gird up herself to a vigorous performance of duties, in a way of quick, active communion with Christ. Before she is aware, she hath lost her Beloved; then she moans, inquires, cries, endures woundings, reproaches, and all, before she obtains him again. Consider, then, O poor soul, thy state and condi-

Digitized by Google

tion! Doth thy light burn dim? or though it give to others as great a blaze as formerly, yet thou seest not so clearly the face of God in Christ by it as thou hast done? 2 Cor. iv. 6. Is thy zeal cold? or if it do the same works as formerly, yet thy heart is not warmed with the love of God and to God in them as formerly, but only thou proceedest in the course thou hast been in? Art thou negligent in the duties of praying or hearing? or if thou dost observe them, thou doest it not with that life and vigour as formerly? Dost thou flag in thy profession? or if thou keep it up, yet thy wheels are oiled by some sinister respects from within or without? Does thy delight in the people of God faint and grow cold? or is thy love to them changing from that which is purely spiritual into that which is very carnal, upon the account of suitableness of principles and natural spirits, if not worse foundations? If thou art drowsing in such a condition as this, take heed; thou art falling into some woful temptation that will break all thy bones, and give thee wounds that shall stick by thee all the days of thy life. Yea, when thou awakest, thou wilt find that it hath indeed laid hold of thee already, though thou perceivedst it not; it hath smitten and wounded thee, though thou hast not complained nor sought for relief or healing.

Such was the state of the church of Sardis, Rev. iii. 2. "The things that remained were ready to die." "Be watchful," says our Saviour, "and strengthen them, or a worse thing will befall thee." If any that reads the word of this direction be in this condition, if he hath any regard of his poor soul, let him now awake, before he be entangled beyond recovery. Take this warning from God; despise it not.

(3.) A season of *great spiritual enjoyments* is often, by the malice of Satan and the weakness of our hearts, turned into a season of danger as to this business of temptation.

We know how the case stood with Paul, 2 Cor. xii. 7. He had glorious spiritual revelations of God and Jesus Christ. Instantly Satan falls upon him, a messenger from him buffets him; so that he earnestly begs its departure, but yet is left to struggle with it. God is pleased sometimes to give us especial discoveries of himself and his love, to fill the heart with his kindness; Christ takes us into the banqueting-house, and gives our hearts their fills of love; and this by some signal work of his Spirit, overpowering us with a sense of love in the unspeakable privilege of adoption, and so fills our souls with joy unspeakable and glorious. A man would think this was the securest condition in the world. What soul does not cry with Peter in the mount, "It is good for me to be here; to abide here for ever?" But yet very frequently some bitter temptation is now at hand. Satan sees that, being possessed by the joy before us, we quickly

Digitized by Google

neglect many ways of approach to our souls, wherein he seeks and finds advantages against us. Is this, then, our state and condition? Does God at any time give us to drink of the rivers of pleasure that are at his right hand, and satisfy our souls with his kindness as with marrow and fatness? Let us not say, "We shall never be moved;" we know not how soon God may hide his face, or a messenger from Satan may buffet us.

Besides, there lies oftentimes a greater and worse deceit in this business. Men cheat their souls with their own fancies, instead of a sense of God's love by the Holy Ghost; and when they are lifted up with their imaginations, it is not expressible how fearfully they are exposed to all manner of temptations;—and how, then, are they able to find relief against their consciences from their own foolish fancies and deceivings, wherewith they sport themselves? May we not see such every day,—persons walking in the vanities and ways of this world, yet boasting of their sense of the love of God? Shall we believe them? We must not, then, believe truth itself; and how woful, then, must their condition needs be!

(4.) A fourth season is a season of *self-confidence;* then usually temptation is at hand.

The case of Peter is clear unto this: "I will not deny thee; though all men should deny thee I will not; though I were to die for it, I would not do it." This said the poor man when he stood on the very brink of that temptation that cost him in the issue such bitter tears. And this taught him so far to know himself all his days, and gave him such acquaintance with the state of all believers, that when he had received more of the Spirit and of power, yet he had less of confidence, and saw it was fit that others should have so also, and therefore persuades all men to "pass the time of their sojourning here in fear," 1 Pet. i. 17; not to be confident and high as he was, lest, as he did, they fall. At the first trial he compares himself with others, and vaunts himself above them: "Though all men should forsake thee, yet I will not." He fears every man more than himself. But when our Saviour afterward comes to him, and puts him directly upon the comparison, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" John xxi. 15, he hath done comparing himself with others, and only crieth, "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." He will lift up himself above others no more. Such a season oftentimes falls out. Temptations are abroad in the world, false doctrines, with innumerable other allurements and provocations: we are ready every one to be very confident that we shall not be surprised with them: though all men should fall into these follies yet we would not: surely we shall never go off from our walking with God; it is impossible our hearts should be so sottish. But says the apostle, "Be not

Digitized by Google

high-minded, but fear; let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Wouldst thou think that Peter, who had walked on the sea with Christ, confessed him to be the Son of God, been with him in the mount, when he heard the voice from the excellent glory, should, at the word of a servant-girl, when there was no legal inquisition after him, no process against him nor any one in his condition, instantly fall a-cursing and swearing that he knew him not? Let them take heed of self-confidence who have any mind to take heed of sin. And this is the first thing in our watching, to consider well the seasons wherein temptation usually makes its approaches to the soul, and be armed against them. And these are some of the seasons wherein temptations are nigh at hand.

CHAPTER VII.

Several acts of watchfulness against temptation proposed—Watch the heart—What it is to be watched in and about—Of the snares lying in men's natural tempers—Of peculiar lusts—Of occasions suited to them—Watching to lay in provision against temptation—Directions for watchfulness in the first approaches of temptation—Directions after entering into temptation.

THAT part of watchfulness against temptation which we have considered regards the outward means, occasions, and advantages of temptation; proceed we now to that which respects the *heart itself*, which is wrought upon and entangled by temptation. Watching or keeping of the heart, which above all keepings we are obliged unto, comes within the compass of this duty also; for the right performance whereof take these ensuing directions:—

(1.) Let him that would not enter into temptation labour to know his own heart, to be acquainted with his own spirit, his natural frame and temper, *his lusts and corruptions*, his natural, sinful, or spiritual weaknesses, that, finding where his weakness lies, he may be careful to keep at a distance from all occasions of sin.

Our Saviour tells the disciples that "they knew not what spirit they were of;" which, under a pretence of zeal, betrayed them into ambition and desire of revenge. Had they known it they would have watched over themselves. David tells us, Ps. xviii. 23, that he considered his ways, and "kept himself from his iniquity," which he was particularly prone unto.

There are advantages for temptations lying oftentimes in men's *natural tempers and constitutions*. Some are naturally gentle, facile, easy to be entreated, pliable; which, though it be the noblest temper of nature, and the best and choicest ground, when well

Digitized by Google

broken up and fallowed for grace to grow in, yet, if not watched over, will be a means of innumerable surprisals and entanglements in temptation. Others are earthy, froward, morose; so that envy, malice, selfishness, peevishness, harsh thoughts of others, repinings, lie at the very door of their natures, and they can scarce step out but they are in the snare of one or other of them. Others are passionate, and the like. Now, he that would watch that he enter not into temptation, had need be acquainted with his own natural temper, that he may watch over the treacheries that lie in it continually. Take heed lest you have a Jehu in you, that shall make you drive furiously; or a Jonah in you, that will make you ready to repine; or a David, that will make you hasty in your determinations, as he was often, in the warmth and goodness of his natural temper. He who watches not this thoroughly; who is not exactly skilled in the knowledge of himself, will never be disentangled from one temptation or another all his days.

Again: as men have peculiar natural tempers, which, according as they are attended or managed, prove a great *fomes* of sin, or advantage to the exercise of grace; so men may have *peculiar lusts* or corruptions, which, either by their natural constitution or education, and other prejudices, have got deep rooting and strength in them. This, also, is to be found out by him who would not enter into temptation. Unless he know it, unless his eyes be always on it, unless he observes its actings, motions, advantages, it will continually be entangling and ensnaring of him. This, then, is our sixth direction in this kind:—Labour to know *thine own frame* and temper; what spirit thou art of; what associates in thy heart Satan hath; where corruption is strong, where grace is weak; what stronghold lust hath in thy natural constitution, and the like. How many have all their comforts blasted and peace disturbed by their natural passion and peevishness! How many are *rendered useless* in the world by their frowardness and discontent! How many are disquieted even by their own gentleness and facility! Be acquainted, then, with thine own heart: though it be deep, search it; though it be dark, inquire into it; though it give all its distempers other names than what are their due, believe it not. Were not men utter strangers to themselves, —did they not give flattering titles to their natural distempers,—did they not strive rather to justify, palliate, or excuse the evils of their hearts, that are suited to their natural tempers and constitutions, than to destroy them, and by these means keep themselves off from taking a clear and distinct view of them,—it were impossible that they should all their days hang in the same briers without attempt for deliverance. Uselessness and scandal in professors are branches growing constantly on this root of unacquaintedness with their own frame

Digitized by Google

and temper; and how few are there who will either study them themselves or bear with those who would acquaint them with them!

(2.) When thou knowest the *state and condition* of thy heart as to the particulars mentioned, watch against all such occasions and opportunities, employments, societies, retirements, businesses, as are apt to entangle thy natural temper or provoke thy corruption.

It may be there are some ways, some societies, some businesses, that thou never in thy life escapedst them, but sufferedst by them more or less, through their suitableness to entice or provoke thy corruption; it may be thou art in a state and condition of life that weary thee day by day, on the account of thy ambition, passion, discontent, or the like: if thou hast any love to thy soul, it is time for thee to awake and to deliver thyself as a bird from the evil snare. Peter will not come again in haste to the high priest's hall; nor would David walk again on the top of his house, when he should have been on the high places of the field. But the particulars of this instance are so various, and of such several natures in respect of several persons, that it is impossible to enumerate them, Prov. iv. 14, 15. Herein lies no small part of that wisdom which consists in our ordering our conversation aright. Seeing we have so little power over our hearts when once they meet with suitable provocations, we are to keep them asunder, as a man would do fire and the combustible parts of the house wherein he dwells.

(3.) Be sure to lay in *provision* in store against the approaching of any temptation.

This also belongs to our watchfulness over our hearts. You will say, "What provision is intended, and where is it to be laid up?" Our hearts, as our Saviour speaks, are our treasury. There we lay up whatever we have, good or bad; and thence do we draw it for our use, Matt. xii. 35. It is the heart, then, wherein provision is to be laid up against temptation. When an enemy draws nigh to a fort or castle to besiege and take it, oftentimes, if he find it well manned and furnished with provision for a siege, and so able to hold out, he withdraws and assaults it not. If Satan, the prince of this world, come and find our hearts fortified against his batteries, and provided to hold out, he not only departs, but, as James says, he flees: "He will flee from us," James iv. 7. For the provision to be laid up, it is that which is provided in the gospel for us. Gospel provisions will do this work; that is, keep the heart full of a sense of the love of God in Christ. This is the greatest preservative against the power of temptation in the world Joseph had this; and therefore, on the first appearance of temptation, he cries out, "How can I do this great evil, and sin against God?" and there is an end of the temptation as to him; it lays no hold on him, but departs. He was furnished with such a ready sense of the love

Digitized by Google

of God as temptation could not stand before, Gen. xxxix. 9. "The love of Christ constraineth us," saith the apostle, "to live to him," 2 Cor. v. 14; and so, consequently, to withstand temptation. A man may, nay, he ought to lay in provisions of the law also,—fear of death, hell, punishment, with the terror of the Lord in them. But these are far more easily conquered than the other; nay, they will never stand alone against a vigorous assault. They are conquered in convinced persons every day; hearts stored with them will struggle for a while, but quickly give over. But store the heart with a sense of the love of God in Christ, with the eternal design of his grace, with a taste of the blood of Christ, and his love in the shedding of it; get a relish of the privileges we have thereby,—our adoption, justification, acceptation with God; fill the heart with thoughts of the beauty of holiness, as it is designed by Christ for the end, issue, and effect of his death;—and thou wilt, in an ordinary course of walking with God, have great peace and security as to the disturbance of temptations. When men can live and plod on in their profession, and not be able to say when they had any living sense of the love of God or of the privileges which we have in the blood of Christ, I know not what they can have to keep them from falling into snares. The apostle tells us that the "peace of God," φρουρήσει τὰς καρδίας, Phil. iv. 7, "shall keep our hearts." Φρουρά is a military word,—a garrison; and so φρουρήσει is, "shall keep as in a garrison." Now, a garrison hath two things attending it,—first, That it is exposed to the assaults of its enemies; secondly, That safety lies in it from their attempts. It is so with our souls; they are exposed to temptations, assaulted continually; but if there be a garrison in them, or if they be kept as in a garrison, temptation shall not enter, and consequently we shall not enter into temptation. Now, how is this done? Saith he, "The peace of God shall do it." What is this "peace of God?" A sense of his love and favour in Jesus Christ. Let this abide in you, and it shall garrison you against all assaults whatever. Besides, there is that, in an especial manner, which is also in all the rest of the directions,—namely, that the thing itself lies in a direct opposition to all the ways and means that temptation can make use of to approach unto our souls. Contending to obtain and keep a sense of the love of God in Christ, in the nature of it, obviates all the workings and insinuations of temptation. Let this be a third direction, then, in our watching against temptation:—Lay in store of gospel provisions, that may make the soul a defenced place against all the assaults thereof.

(4.) In the first approach of any temptation, as we are all tempted, these directions following are also suited to carry on the work of watching, which we are in the pursuit of:—

[1.] Be always awake, that thou mayst have an *early discovery*

Digitized by Google

of thy temptation, that thou mayst know it so to be. Most men perceive not their enemy until they are wounded by him. Yea, others may sometimes see them deeply engaged, whilst themselves are utterly insensible; they sleep without any sense of danger, until others come and awake them by telling them that their house is on fire. Temptation in a neuter sense is not easily discoverable,—namely, as it denotes such a way, or thing, or matter, as is or may be made use of for the ends of temptation. Few take notice of it until it is too late, and they find themselves entangled, if not wounded. Watch, then, to understand betimes the snares that are laid for thee,—to understand the advantages thy enemies have against thee, before they get strength and power, before they are incorporated with thy lusts, and have distilled poison into thy soul.

[2.] Consider the *aim* and tendency of the temptation, whatever it be, and of all that are concerned in it. Those who have an active concurrence into thy temptation are Satan and thy own lusts. For thine own lust, I have manifested elsewhere what it aims at in all its actings and enticings. It never rises up but its intendment is the worst of evils. Every acting of it would be a formed enmity against God. Hence look upon it in its first attempts, what pretences soever may be made, as thy mortal enemy. "I hate it," saith the apostle, Rom. vii. 15,—that is, the working of lust in me. "I hate it; it is the greatest enemy I have. Oh, that it were killed and destroyed! Oh, that I were delivered out of the power of it!" Know, then, that in the first attempt or assault in any temptation, the most cursed, sworn enemy is at hand, is setting on thee, and that for thy utter ruin; so that it were the greatest madness in the world to throw thyself into his arms to be destroyed. But of this I have spoken in my discourse of Mortification.

Hath Satan any more friendly aim and intention towards thee, who is a sharer in every temptation? To beguile thee as a serpent, to devour thee as a lion, is the friendship that he owes thee. I shall only add, that the sin he tempts thee to against the law, it is not the thing he aims at; his design lies against thy interest in the gospel. He would make sin but a bridge to get over to a better ground, to assault thee as to thy interest in Christ. He who perhaps will say to-day, "Thou mayst venture on sin, because thou hast an interest in Christ," will to-morrow tell thee to the purpose that thou hast none, because thou hast done so.

[3.] *Meet* thy temptation in its entrance with *thoughts of faith* concerning Christ on the cross; this will make it sink before thee. Entertain no parley, no dispute with it, if thou wouldst not enter into it. Say, "'It is Christ that died,'—that died for such sins as these." This is called "taking the shield of faith to quench the fiery

Digitized by Google

darts of Satan," Eph. vi. 16. Faith doth it by laying hold on Christ crucified, his love therein, and what from thence he suffered for sin. Let thy temptation be what it will,—be it unto sin, to fear or doubting for sin, or about thy state and condition,—it is not able to stand before faith lifting up the standard of the cross. We know what means the Papists, who have lost the power of faith, use to keep up the form. They will sign themselves with the sign of the cross, or make aerial crosses; and by virtue of that work done, think to scare away the devil. To act faith on Christ crucified is really to sign ourselves with the sign of the cross, and thereby shall we overcome that wicked one, 1 Pet. v. 9.

[4.] Suppose the soul hath been *surprised* by temptation, and entangled at unawares, so that now it is too late to resist the first entrances of it, what shall such a soul do that it be not plunged into it, and carried away with the power thereof?

1*st.* Do as Paul did: beseech God again and again that it may "depart from thee," 2 Cor. xii. 8. And if thou abidest therein, thou shalt certainly either be speedily delivered out of it, or receive a sufficiency of grace not to be foiled utterly by it. Only, as I said in part before, do not so much employ thy thoughts about the things whereunto thou art tempted, which oftentimes raiseth farther entanglements, but set thyself against the temptation itself. Pray against the temptation that it may depart; and when that is taken away, the things themselves may be more calmly considered.

2*dly.* Fly to Christ, in a peculiar manner, as he was tempted, and beg of him to give thee succour in this "needful time of trouble." Heb. iv. 16, the apostle instructs us herein: "In that he hath been tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." This is the meaning of it: "When you are tempted and are ready to faint, when you want succour,—you must have it or you die,—act faith peculiarly on Christ as he was tempted; that is, consider that he was tempted himself,—that he suffered thereby,—that he conquered all temptations, and that not merely on his own account, seeing for our sakes he submitted to be tempted, but for us," (he conquered in and by himself, but for us.) And draw, yea, expect succour from him, Heb. iv. 15, 16. Lie down at his feet, make thy complaint known to him, beg his assistance, and it will not be in vain.

3*dly.* Look to Him who hath *promised deliverance.* Consider that he is faithful, and will not suffer thee to be tempted above what thou art able. Consider that he hath promised a comfortable issue of these trials and temptations. Call all the promises to mind of assistance and deliverance that he hath made; ponder them in thy heart. And rest upon it, that God hath innumerable ways that thou knowest not of to give thee in deliverance; as,—

Digitized by Google

(1*st.*) He can send an *affliction* that shall mortify thy heart unto the matter of the temptation, whatever it be, that that which was before a sweet morsel under the tongue shall neither have taste or relish in it unto thee,—thy desire to it shall be killed; as was the case with David: or,

(2*dly.*) He can, by *some providence*, alter that whole state of things from whence thy temptation doth arise, so taking fuel from the fire, causing it to go out of itself; as it was with the same David in the day of battle: or,

(3*dly.*) He can *tread down Satan under thy feet*, that he shall not dare to suggest any thing any more to thy disadvantage (the God of peace shall do it), that thou shalt hear of him no more: or,

(4*thly.*) He can give thee such *supply of grace* as that thou mayst be freed, though not from the temptation itself, yet from the tendency and danger of it; as was the case with Paul: or,

(5*thly.*) He can give thee such a comfortable persuasion of *good success* in the issue as that thou shalt have refreshment in thy trials, and be kept from the trouble of the temptation; as was the case with the same Paul: or,

(6*thly.*) He can *utterly remove* it, and make thee a complete conqueror. And innumerable other ways he hath of keeping thee from entering into temptation, so as to be foiled by it.

4*thly.* Consider where the temptation wherewith thou art surprised hath made its entrance, and by what means, and with all speed make up the breach. Stop that passage which the waters have made to enter in at. Deal with thy soul like a wise physician. Inquire when, how, by what means, thou fellest into this distemper; and if thou findest negligence, carelessness, want of keeping watch over thyself, to have lain at the bottom of it, fix thy soul there,—bewail that before the Lord,—make up that breach,—and then proceed to the work that lies before thee.

CHAPTER VIII.

The last general direction, Rev. iii. 10: Watch against temptation by constant "keeping the word of Christ's patience"—What that word is—How it is kept—How the keeping of it will keep us from the "hour of temptation."

THE directions insisted on in the former chapters are such as are partly given us, in their several particulars, up and down the Scripture; partly arise from the nature of the thing itself. There is one general direction remains, which is comprehensive of all that went before, and also adds many more particulars unto them. This con-

Digitized by Google

tains an approved antidote against the poison of temptation,—a remedy that Christ himself hath marked with a note of efficacy and success; that is given us, Rev. iii. 10, in the words of our Saviour himself to the church of Philadelphia. "Because," saith he, "thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will also keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell in the earth." Christ is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." As he dealt with the church of Philadelphia, so will he deal with us. If we "keep the word of his patience," he will "keep us from the hour of temptation." This, then, being a way of rolling the whole care of this weighty affair on him who is able to bear it, it requires our peculiar consideration.

And, therefore, I shall show,—(1.) What it is to "keep the word of Christ's patience," that we may know how to perform our duty; and, (2.) How this will be a means of our preservation, which will establish us in the faith of Christ's promise.

(1.) The word of Christ is the word of the gospel; the word by him revealed from the bosom of the Father; the word of the Word; the word spoken in time of the eternal Word. So it is called "The word of Christ," Col. iii. 16; or "The gospel of Christ," Rom. i. 16, 1 Cor. ix. 12; and "The doctrine of Christ," Heb. vi. 1. "Of Christ," that is, as its author, Heb. i. 1, 2; and of him, as the chief subject or matter of it, 2 Cor. i. 20. Now, this word is called "The word of Christ's patience," or tolerance and forbearance, upon the account of that patience and long-suffering which, in the dispensation of it, the Lord Christ exerciseth towards the whole, and to all persons in it; and that both actively and passively, in his bearing with men and enduring from them:—

[1.] He is patient towards his *saints;* he bears with them, suffers from them. He is "patient to us-ward," 2 Pet. iii. 9,—that is, that believe. The gospel is the word of Christ's patience even to believers. A soul acquainted with the gospel knows that there is no property of Christ rendered more glorious therein than that of his patience. That he should bear with so many unkindnesses, so many causeless breaches, so many neglects of his love, so many affronts done to his grace, so many violations of engagements as he doth, it manifests his gospel to be not only the word of his grace but also of his patience. He suffers also *from* them in all the reproaches they bring upon his name and ways; and he suffers *in* them, for "in all their afflictions he is afflicted."

[2.] Towards his *elect* not yet effectually called. Rev. iii. 20, he stands waiting at the door of their hearts and knocks for an entrance. He deals with them by all means, and yet stands and waits until "his head is filled with the dew, and his locks with the drops of the

Digitized by Google

night," Cant. v. 2; as enduring the cold and inconveniences of the night, that when his morning is come he may have entrance. Oftentimes for a long season he is by them scorned in his person, persecuted in his saints and ways, reviled in his word, whilst he stands at the door in the word of his patience, with his heart full of love towards their poor rebellious souls.

[3.] To the *perishing world.* Hence the time of his kingdom in this world is called the time of his "patience," Rev. i. 9. He "endures the vessels of wrath with much long-suffering," Rom. ix. 22. Whilst the gospel is administered in the world he is patient towards the men thereof, until the saints in heaven and earth are astonished and cry out, "How long?" Ps. xiii. 1, 2; Rev. vi. 10. And themselves do mock at him as if he were an idol, 2 Pet. iii. 4. He endures from them bitter things, in his name, ways, worship, saints, promises, threats, all his interest of honour and love; and yet passeth by them, lets them alone, does them good. Nor will he cut this way of proceeding short until the gospel shall be preached no more. Patience must accompany the gospel.

Now, this is the word that is to be kept, that we may be kept from "the hour of temptation."

(2.) Three things are implied in the keeping of this word: [1.] Knowledge; [2.] Valuation; [3.] Obedience:—

[1.] *Knowledge.* He that will keep this word must know it, be acquainted with it, under a fourfold notion:—1*st.* As a word of *grace* and *mercy*, to save him; 2*dly.* As a word of *holiness* and *purity*, to sanctify him; 3*dly.* As a word of *liberty* and *power*, to ennoble him and set him free; 4*thly.* As a word of *consolation*, to support him in every condition:—

1*st.* As a word of *grace* and *mercy*, able to save us: "It is the power of God unto salvation," Rom. i. 16; "The grace of God that bringeth salvation," Tit. ii. 11; "The word of grace that is able to build us up, and to give us an inheritance among all them that are sanctified," Acts xx. 32; "The word that is able to save our souls," James i. 21. When the word of the gospel is known as a word of mercy, grace, and pardon, as the sole evidence for life, as the conveyance of an eternal inheritance; when the soul finds it such to itself, it will strive to keep it.

2*dly.* As a word of *holiness* and *purity*, able to sanctify him: "Ye are clean through the word I have spoken unto you," saith our Saviour, John xv. 3. To that purpose is his prayer, chap. xvii. 17. He that knows not the word of Christ's patience as a sanctifying, cleansing word, in the power of it upon his own soul, neither knows it nor keeps it. The empty profession of our days knows not one step towards this duty; and thence it is that the most are so overborne under the power of temptations. Men full of self, of the world, of

Digitized by Google

fury, ambition, and almost all unclean lusts, do yet talk of keeping the word of Christ! See 1 Pet. i. 2; 2 Tim. ii. 19.

3*dly.* As a word of *liberty* and *power*, to ennoble him and set him free;—and this not only from the guilt of sin and from wrath, for that it doth as it is a word of grace and mercy; not only from the power of sin, for that it doth as it is a word of holiness; but also from all outward respects of men or the world that might entangle him or enslave him. It declares us to be "Christ's freemen," and in bondage unto none, John viii. 32; 1 Cor. vii. 23. We are not by it freed from due subjection unto superiors, nor from any duty, nor unto any sin, 1 Pet. ii. 16; but in two respects it is a word of freedom, liberty, largeness of mind, power, and deliverance from bondage:—

(1*st.*) In respect of *conscience* as to the worship of God, Gal. v. 1.

(2*dly.*) In respect of *ignoble*, slavish respects unto the men or things of the world, in the course of our pilgrimage. The gospel gives a free, large, and noble spirit, in subjection to God, and none else. There is administered in it a spirit "not of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind," 2 Tim. i. 7; a mind "in nothing terrified," Phil. i. 28,—not swayed with any by-respect whatever. There is nothing more unworthy of the gospel than a mind in bondage to persons or things, prostituting itself to the lusts of men or affrightments of the world. And he that thus knows the word of Christ's patience, really and in power, is even thereby freed from innumerable, from unspeakable temptations.

4*thly.* As a word of *consolation*, to support him in every condition, and to be a full portion in the want of all. It is a word attended with "joy unspeakable and full of glory." It gives supportment, relief, refreshment, satisfaction, peace, consolation, joy, boasting, glory, in every condition whatever. Thus to know the word of Christ's patience, thus to know the gospel, is the first part, and it is a great part, of this condition of our preservation from the hour and power of temptation.

[2.] *Valuation* of what is thus known belongs to the keeping of this word. It is to be kept as a treasure. 2 Tim. i. 14, Τὴν καλὴν παραθήκην,—that excellent "depositum" (that is, the word of the gospel),—"keep it," saith the apostle, "by the Holy Ghost;" and, "Hold fast the faithful word," Tit. i. 9. It is a good treasure, a faithful word; hold it fast. It is a word that comprises the whole interest of Christ in the world. To value that as our chiefest treasure is to keep the word of Christ's patience. They that will have a regard from Christ in the time of temptation are not to be regardless of his concernments.

[3.] *Obedience.* Personal obedience, in the universal observation of all the commands of Christ, is the keeping of his word, John

Digitized by Google

xiv. 15. Close adherence unto Christ in holiness and universal obedience, then when the opposition that the gospel of Christ doth meet withal in the world doth render it signally the word of his patience, is the life and soul of the duty required.

Now, all these are to be so managed with that intension of mind and spirit, that care of heart and diligence of the whole person, as to make up a keeping of this word; which evidently includes all these considerations.

We are arrived, then, to the sum of this safeguarding duty, of this condition of freedom from the power of temptation:—He that, having a due acquaintance with the gospel in its excellencies, as to him a word of mercy, holiness, liberty, and consolation, values it, in all its concernments, as his choicest and only treasure,—makes it his business and the work of his life to give himself up unto it in universal obedience, then especially when opposition and apostasy put the patience of Christ to the utmost,—he shall be preserved from the hour of temptation.

This is that which is comprehensive of all that went before, and is exclusive of all other ways for the obtaining of the end purposed. Nor let any man think without this to be kept one hour from entering into temptation; wherever he fails, there temptation enters. That this will be a sure preservative may appear from the ensuing considerations:—

(1.) It hath the *promise* of preservation, and this alone hath so. It is solemnly promised, in the place mentioned, to the church of Philadelphia on this account. When a great trial and temptation was to come on the world, at the opening of the seventh seal, Rev. vii. 3, a caution is given for the preservation of God's sealed ones, which are described to be those who keep the word of Christ; for the promise is that it should be so.

Now, in every promise there are three things to be considered:—[1.] The *faithfulness* of the Father, who gives it. [2.] The *grace* of the Son, which is the matter of it. [3.] The *power* and *efficacy* of the Holy Ghost, which puts the promise in execution. And all these are engaged for the preservation of such persons from the hour of temptation.

[1.] The *faithfulness* of God accompanieth the promise. On this account is our deliverance laid, 1 Cor. x. 13. Though we be tempted, yet we shall be kept from the hour of temptation; it shall not grow too strong for us. What comes on us we shall be able to bear; and what would be too hard for us we shall escape. But what security have we hereof? Even the faithfulness of God: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you," etc. And wherein is God's faithfulness seen and exercised? "He is faithful that promised," Heb. x. 23; his

Digitized by Google

faithfulness consists in his discharge of his promises. "He abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself," 2 Tim. ii. 13. So that by being under the promise, we have the faithfulness of God engaged for our preservation.

[2.] There is in every promise of the covenant *the grace of the Son;* that is the subject-matter of all promises: "I will keep thee." How? "By my grace with thee." So that what assistance the grace of Christ can give a soul that hath a right in this promise, in the hour of temptation it shall enjoy it. Paul's temptation grew very high; it was likely to have come to its prevalent hour. He "besought the Lord," that is, the Lord Jesus Christ, for help, 2 Cor. xii. 8; and received that answer from him, "My grace is sufficient for thee," verse 9. That it was the Lord Christ and his grace with whom he had peculiarly to do is evident from the close of that verse: "I will glory in my infirmity, that the power of Christ may rest upon me;" or "the efficacy of the grace of Christ in my preservation be made evident." So Heb. ii. 18.

[3.] The *efficacy* of the Spirit accompanieth the promises. He is called "The Holy Spirit of promise;" not only because he is promised by Christ, but also because he effectually makes good the promise, and gives it accomplishment in our souls. He also, then, is engaged to preserve the soul walking according to the rule laid down. See Isa. lix. 21. Thus, where the promise is, there is all this assistance. The faithfulness of the Father, the grace of the Son, the power of the Spirit, all are engaged in our preservation.

(2.) This *constant, universal* keeping of Christ's word of patience will keep the heart and soul in such a frame, as wherein no prevalent temptation, by virtue of any advantages whatever, can seize upon it, so as totally to prevail against it. So David prays, Ps. xxv. 21, "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me." This integrity and uprightness is the Old Testament-keeping the word of Christ,—universal close walking with God. Now, how can they preserve a man? Why, by keeping his heart in such a frame, so defended on every side, that no evil can approach or take hold on him. Fail a man in his integrity, he hath an open place for temptation to enter, Isa. lvii. 21. To keep the word of Christ, is to do it universally, as hath been showed. This exercises grace in all the faculties of the soul, and compasses it with the whole armour of God. The understanding is full of light; the affections, of love and holiness. Let the wind blow from what quarter it will, the soul is fenced and fortified; let the enemy assault when or by what means he pleaseth, all things in the soul of such a one are upon the guard; "How can I do this thing, and sin against God?" is at hand. Especially, upon a twofold account doth deliverance and security arise from this hand:—

Digitized by Google

[1.] By the *mortification* of the heart unto the matter of temptations. The prevalency of any temptation arises from hence, that the heart is ready to close with the matter of it. There are lusts within, suited to the proposals of the world or Satan without. Hence James resolves all temptations into our "own lusts," chap. i. 14; because either they proceed from or are made effectual by them, as hath been declared. Why doth terror or threats turn us aside from a due constancy in the performance of our duty? Is it not because there is unmortified, carnal fear abiding in us, that tumultuates in such a season? Why is it that the allurements of the world and compliances with men entangle us? Is it not because our affections are entangled with the things and considerations proposed unto us? Now, keeping the word of Christ's patience, in the manner declared, keeps the heart mortified to these things, and so it is not easily entangled by them. Saith the apostle, Gal. ii. 20, "I am crucified with Christ." He that keeps close to Christ is crucified with him, and is dead to all the desires of the flesh and the world; as more fully, chap. vi. 14. Here the match is broken, and all love, entangling love, dissolved. The heart is crucified to the world and all things in it. Now the matter of all temptations almost is taken out of the world; the men of it, or the things of it, make them up. "As to these things," says the apostle, "I am crucified to them," (and it is so with every one that keeps the word of Christ.) "My heart is mortified unto them. I have no desire after them, nor affection to them, nor delight in them, and they are crucified unto me. The crowns, glories, thrones, pleasures, profits of the world, I see nothing desirable in them. The lusts, sensual pleasures, love, respects, honours of men, name and reputation among them, they are all as a thing of nought. I have no value nor estimation of them." This soul is safeguarded from assaults of manifold temptations. When Achan saw the "goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold," first he "coveted them," then he "took them," Josh. vii. 21. Temptation subtly spreads the Babylonish garment of favour, praise, peace, the silver of pleasure or profit, with the golden contentments of the flesh, before the eyes of men. If now there be that in them alive, unmortified, that will presently fall a-coveting; let what fear of punishment will ensue, the heart or hand will be put forth unto iniquity.

Herein, then, lies the security of such a frame as that described: It is always accompanied with a mortified heart, crucified unto the things that are the matter of our temptations; without which it is utterly impossible that we should be preserved one moment when any temptation doth befall us. If liking, and love of the things proposed, insinuated, commended in the temptation, be living and active in us, we shall not be able to resist and stand.

Digitized by Google

[2.] In this frame the heart is *filled with better things* and their excellency, so far as to be fortified against the matter of any temptation. See what resolution this puts Paul upon, Phil. iii. 8; all is "loss and dung" to him. Who would go out of his way to have his arms full of loss and dung? And whence is it that he hath this estimation of the most desirable things in the world? It is from that dear estimation he had of the excellency of Christ. So, verse 10, when the soul is exercised to communion with Christ, and to walking with him, he drinks new wine, and cannot desire the old things of the world, for he says "The new is better." He tastes every day how gracious the Lord is; and therefore longs not after the sweetness of forbidden things,—which indeed have none. He that makes it his business to eat daily of the tree of life will have no appetite unto other fruit, though the tree that bear them seem to stand in the midst of paradise. This the spouse makes the means of her preservation; even the excellency which, by daily communion, she found in Christ and his graces above all other desirable things. Let a soul exercise itself to a communion with Christ in the good things of the gospel,—pardon of sin, fruits of holiness, hope of glory, peace with God, joy in the Holy Ghost, dominion over sin,—and he shall have a mighty preservative against all temptations. As the full soul loatheth the honey-comb,—as a soul filled with carnal, earthly, sensual contentments finds no relish nor savour in the sweetest spiritual things; so he that is satisfied with the kindness of God, as with marrow and fatness,—that is, every day entertained at the banquet of wine, wine upon the lees, and well refined,—hath a holy contempt of the baits and allurements that lie in prevailing temptations, and is safe.

(3.) He that so keeps the word of Christ's patience is always furnished with *preserving considerations* and preserving principles,—moral and real advantages of preservation.

[1.] He is furnished with preserving *considerations*, that powerfully influence his soul in his walking diligently with Christ. Besides the sense of duty which is always upon him, he considers,—

1*st.* The *concernment* of Christ, whom his soul loves, in him and his careful walking. He considers that the presence of Christ is with him, his eye upon him; that he ponders his heart and ways, as one greatly concerned in his deportment of himself, in a time of trial. So Christ manifests himself to do, Rev. ii. 19–23. He considers all,—what is acceptable, what is to be rejected. He knows that Christ is concerned in his honour, that his name be not evil spoken of by reason of him; that he is concerned in love to his soul, having that design upon him to "present him holy, and unblamable, and unreprovable in his sight," Col. i. 22,—and his Spirit is grieved where he is interrupted in this work; concerned on the account of his gos-

Digitized by Google

pel, the progress and acceptation of it in the world,—its beauty would be slurred, its good things reviled, its progress stopped, if such a one be prevailed against; concerned in his love to others, who are grievously scandalized, and perhaps ruined, by the miscarriages of such. When Hymeneus and Philetus fell, they overthrew the faith of some. And says such a soul, then, who is exercised to keep the word of Christ's patience, when intricate, perplexed, entangling temptations, public, private, personal, do arise, "Shall I now be careless? shall I be negligent? shall I comply with the world and the ways of it? Oh, what thoughts of heart hath he concerning me, whose eye is upon me! Shall I contemn his honour, despise his love, trample his gospel in the mire under the feet of men, turn aside others from his ways? Shall such a man as I fly, give over resistings? It cannot be." There is no man who keeps the word of the patience of Christ but is full of this soul-pressing consideration. It dwells on his heart and spirit; and the love of Christ constrains him so to keep his heart and ways, 2 Cor. v. 14.

2*dly.* The great consideration of *the temptations of Christ* in his behalf, and the conquest he made in all assaults for his sake and his God, dwell also on his spirit. The prince of this world came upon him, every thing in earth or hell that hath either allurement or affrightment in it was proposed to him, to divert him from the work of mediation which for us he had undertaken. This whole life he calls the time of his "temptations;" but he resisted all, conquered all, and is become a Captain of salvation to them that obey him. "And," says the soul, "shall this temptation, these arguings, this plausible pretence, this sloth, this self-love, this sensuality, this bait of the world, turn me aside, prevail over me, to desert him who went before me in the ways of all temptations that his holy nature was obnoxious unto, for my good?"

3*dly. Dismal thoughts* of the *loss of love*, of the smiles of the countenance of Christ, do also frequently exercise such a soul. He knows what it is to enjoy the favour of Christ, to have a sense of his love, to be accepted in his approaches to him, to converse with him, and perhaps hath been sometimes at some loss in this thing; and so knows also what it is to be in the dark, distanced from him. See the deportment of the spouse in such a case, Cant. iii. 4. When she had once found him again, she holds him; she will not let him go; she will lose him no more.

[2.] He that keeps the word of Christ's patience hath preserving *principles* whereby he is acted. Some of them may be mentioned:—

1*st.* In all things he lives by *faith*, and is acted by it in all his ways, Gal. ii. 20. Now, upon a twofold account hath faith, when improved, the power of preservation from temptation annexed unto it:—

Digitized by Google

(1*st.*) Because it empties the soul of its *own wisdom*, understanding, and fulness, that it may act in the wisdom and fulness of Christ. The only advice for preservation in trials and temptations lies in that of the wise man, Prov. iii. 5, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." This is the *work* of faith; it *is* faith; it is to *live* by faith. The great [cause of] falling of men in trials is their leaning to, or leaning upon, their own understanding and counsel. What is the issue of it? Job xviii. 7, "The steps of his strength shall be straitened, and his own counsel shall cast him down." First, he shall be entangled, and then cast down; and all by his own counsel, until he come to be ashamed of it, as Ephraim was, Hos. x. 6. Whenever in our trials we consult our own understandings, hearken to self-reasonings, though they seem to be good, and tending to our preservation, yet the principle of living by faith is stifled, and we shall in the issue be cast down by our own counsels. Now, nothing can empty the heart of this self-fulness but faith, but living by it, but not living to ourselves, but having Christ live in us by our living by faith on him.

(2*dly.*) Faith, making the soul poor, empty, helpless, destitute in itself, *engages* the heart, will, and power of Jesus Christ for assistance; of which I have spoken more at large elsewhere.

2*dly. Love* to the saints, with care that they suffer not upon our account, is a great preserving principle in a time of temptations and trials. How powerful this was in David, he declares in that earnest prayer, Ps. lxix. 6, "Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel;"—"O let not me so miscarry, that those for whom I would lay down my life should be put to shame, be evil spoken of, dishonoured, reviled, contemned on my account, for my failings." A selfish soul, whose love is turned wholly inwards, will never abide in a time of trial.

Many other considerations and principles that those who keep the word of Christ's patience, in the way and manner before described, are attended withal, might be enumerated; but I shall content myself to have pointed at these mentioned.

And will it now be easy to determine whence it is that so many in our days are prevailed on in the time of trial,—that the hour of temptation comes upon them, and bears them down more or less before it? Is it not because, amongst the great multitude of professors that we have, there are few that keep the word of the patience of Christ? If we wilfully neglect or cast away our interest in the promise of preservation, is it any wonder if we be not preserved? There is an hour of temptation come upon the world, to try them that dwell therein. It variously exerts its power and efficacy. There

Digitized by Google

is not any way or thing wherein it may not be seen acting and putting forth itself. In worldliness; in sensuality; in looseness of conversation; in neglect of spiritual duties, private, public; in foolish, loose, diabolical opinions; in haughtiness and ambition; in envy and wrath; in strife and debate, revenge, selfishness; in atheism and contempt of God, doth it appear. They are but branches of the same root, bitter streams of the same fountain, cherished by peace, prosperity, security, apostasies of professors, and the like. And, alas! how many do daily fall under the power of this temptation in general! How few keep their garments girt about them, and undefiled! And if any urging, particular temptation befall any, what instances almost have we of any that escape? May we not describe our condition as the apostle that of the Corinthians, in respect of an outward visitation: "Some are sick, and some are weak, and many sleep?" Some are wounded, some defiled, many utterly lost. What is the spring and fountain of this sad condition of things? Is it not, as hath been said?—we do not keep the word of Christ's patience in universal close walking with him, and so lose the benefit of the promise given and annexed thereunto.

Should I go about to give instances of this thing, of professors coming short of keeping the word of Christ, it would be a long work. These four heads would comprise the most of them:—First, *Conformity* to the world, which Christ hath redeemed us from, almost in all things, with joy and delight in promiscuous compliances with the men of the world. Secondly, *Neglect* of duties which Christ hath enjoined, from close meditation to public ordinances. Thirdly, *Strife*, variance, and debate among ourselves, woful judging and despising one another, upon account of things foreign to the bond of communion that is between the saints. Fourthly, *Self-fulness* as to principles, and selfishness as to ends. Now, where these things are, are not men carnal? Is the word of Christ's patience effectual in them? Shall they be preserved? They shall not.

Would you, then, be preserved and kept from the hour of temptation? would you watch against entering into it?—as deductions from what hath been delivered in this chapter, take the ensuing cautions:—

1. Take heed of leaning on deceitful assistances; as,—

(1.) On your own *counsels*, understandings, reasonings. Though you argue in them never so plausibly in your own defence, they will leave you, betray you. When the temptation comes to any height, they will all turn about, and take part with your enemy, and plead as much for the matter of the temptation, whatever it be, as they pleaded against the end and issue of it before.

(2.) The most vigorous actings, by prayer, fasting, and other such

Digitized by Google

means, against that *particular lust*, corruption, temptation, wherewith you are exercised and have to do. This will not avail you if, in the meantime, there be neglects on other accounts. To hear a man wrestle, cry, contend as to any particular of temptation, and immediately fall into worldly ways, worldly compliances, looseness, and negligence in other things,—it is righteous with Jesus Christ to leave such a one to the hour of temptation.

(3.) The general *security* of saints' perseverance and preservation from total apostasy. Every security that God gives us is good in its kind, and for the pupose for which it is given to us; but when it is given for one end, to use it for another, that is not good or profitable. To make use of the general assurance of preservation from total apostasy, to support the spirit in respect of a particular temptation, will not in the issue advantage the soul; because, notwithstanding that, this or that temptation may prevail. Many relieve themselves with this, until they find themselves in the depth of perplexities.

2. Apply yourselves to this great preservation of faithful keeping the word of Christ's patience, in the midst of all trials and temptations:—

(1.) In particular, wisely consider wherein the word of Christ's patience is most likely to suffer in the days wherein we live and the seasons that pass over us, and so vigorously set yourselves to keep it in that particular peculiarly. You will say, "How shall we know wherein the word of Christ's patience in any season is like to suffer?" I answer, Consider what works he peculiarly performs in any season; and neglect of his word in reference to them is that wherein his word is like to suffer. The works of Christ wherein he hath been peculiarly engaged in our days and seasons seem to be these:—

[1.] The *pouring of contempt* upon the great men and great things of the world, with all the enjoyments of it. He hath discovered the nakedness of all earthly things, in overturning, overturning, overturning, both men and things, to make way for the things that cannot be shaken.

[2.] The *owning of the lot* of his own inheritance in a distinguishing manner, putting a difference between the precious and the vile, and causing his people to dwell alone, as not reckoned with the nations.

[3.] In being *nigh* to faith and prayer, honouring them above all the strength and counsels of the sons of men.

[4.] In recovering his *ordinances* and institutions from the carnal administrations that they were in bondage under by the lusts of men, bringing them forth in the beauty and the power of the Spirit.

Wherein, then, in such a season, must lie the peculiar neglect of the word of Christ's patience? Is it not in setting a value on the

Digitized by Google

world and the things of it, which he hath stained and trampled under foot? Is it not in the slighting of his peculiar lot, his people, and casting them into the same considerations with the men of the world? Is it not in leaning to our own counsels and understandings? Is it not in the defilement of his ordinances, by giving the outward court of the temple to be trod upon by unsanctified persons? Let us, then, be watchful, and in these things keep the word of the patience of Christ, if we love our own preservation.

(2.) In this frame urge the Lord Jesus Christ with his blessed promises, with all the considerations that may be apt to take and hold the King in his galleries, that may work on the heart of our blessed and merciful High Priest, to give suitable succour at time of need.

CHAPTER IX.

General exhortation to the duty prescribed.

HAVING thus passed through the considerations of the duty of watching that we enter not into temptation, I suppose I need not add motives to the observance of it. Those who are not moved by their own sad experiences, nor the importance of the duty, as laid down in the entrance of this discourse, must be left by me to the farther patience of God. I shall only shut up the whole with a general exhortation to them who are in any measure prepared for it by the consideration of what hath been spoken. Should you go into an hospital, and see many persons lying sick and weak, sore and wounded, with many filthy diseases and distempers, and should inquire of them how they fell into this condition, and they shall all agree to tell you such or such a thing was the occasion of it,—"By that I got my wound," says one, "And my disease," says another,—would it not make you a little careful how or what you had to do with that thing or place? Surely it would. Should you go to a dungeon, and see many miserable creatures bound in chains for an approaching day of execution, and inquire the way and means whereby they were brought into that condition, and they should all fix on one and the same thing, would you not take care to avoid it? The case is so with entering into temptation. Ah! how many poor, miserable, spiritually-wounded souls, have we everywhere!—one wounded by one sin, another by another; one falling into filthiness of the flesh, another of the spirit. Ask them, now, how they came into this estate and condition? They must all answer, "Alas! we entered into temptation, we fell into cursed

Digitized by Google

snares and entanglements; and that hath brought us into the woful condition you see!" Nay, if a man could look into the dungeons of hell, and see the poor damned souls that lie bound in chains of darkness, and hear their cries, what would he be taught? What do they say? Are they not cursing their tempters, and the temptations that they entered in? And shall we be negligent in this thing? Solomon tells us that the "simple one that follows the strange woman knows not that the dead are there, that her house inclineth to death, and her paths to the dead" (which he repeats three times); and that is the reason that he ventures on her snares. If you knew what hath been done by entering into temptation, perhaps you would be more watchful and careful. Men may think that they shall do well enough notwithstanding; but, "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burnt? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burnt?" Prov. vi. 27, 28. No such thing; men come not out of their temptation without wounds, burnings, and scars. I know not any place in the world where there is more need of pressing this exhortation than in this place. Go to our several colleges, inquire for such and such young men; what is the answer in respect of many? "Ah! such a one was very hopeful for a season; but he fell into ill company, and he is quite lost. Such a one had some good beginning of religion, we were in great expectation of him; but he is fallen into temptation." And so in other places. "Such a one was useful and humble, adorned the gospel; but now he is so wofully entangled with the world that he is grown all self, hath no sap nor savour. Such a one was humble and zealous; but he is advanced, and hath lost his first love and ways." Oh! how full is the world, how full is this place, of these woful examples; to say nothing of those innumerable poor creatures who are fallen into temptation by delusions in religion. And is it not time for us to awake before it be too late,—to watch against the first rising of sin, the first attempts of Satan, and all ways whereby he hath made his approaches to us, be they never so harmless in themselves?

Have we not experience of our weakness, our folly, *the invincible power* of temptation, when once it is gotten within us? As for this duty that I have insisted on, take these considerations:—

1. If you neglect it, it being the only means prescribed by our Saviour, you will certainly enter into temptation, and as certainly fall into sin. Flatter not yourselves. Some of you are "old disciples;" have a great abhorrency of sin; you think it impossible you should ever be seduced so and so; but, "Let him (whoever he be) that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." It is not any grace received, it is not any experience obtained, it is not any resolution improved, that will preserve you from any evil, unless you stand upon your watch: "What I say unto you," says Christ, "I say unto

Digitized by Google

all, Watch." Perhaps you may have had some good success for a time in your careless frame; but awake, admire God's tenderness and patience, or evil lies at the door. If you will not perform this duty, whoever you are, one way or other, in one thing or other, spiritual or carnal wickedness, you will be tempted, you will be defiled; and what will be the end thereof? Remember Peter!

2. Consider that you are always under the eye of Christ, the great captain of our salvation, who hath enjoined us to watch thus, and pray that we enter not into temptation. What think you are the thoughts and what the heart of Christ, when he sees a temptation hastening towards us, a storm rising about us, and we are fast asleep? Doth it not grieve him to see us expose ourselves so to danger, after he hath given us warning upon warning? Whilst he was in the days of his flesh he considered his temptation whilst it was yet coming, and armed himself against it. "The prince of this world cometh," says he, "but hath no part in me." And shall we be negligent under his eye? Do but think that thou seest him coming to thee as he did to Peter, when he was asleep in the garden, with the same reproof: "What! canst thou not watch one hour?" Would it not be a grief to thee to be so reproved, or to hear him thundering against thy neglect from heaven, as against the church of Sardis? Rev. iii. 2.

3. Consider that if thou neglect this duty, and so fall into temptation,—which assuredly thou wilt do,—that when thou art entangled God may withal bring some heavy affliction or judgment upon thee, which, by reason of thy entanglement, thou shalt not be able to look on any otherwise than as an evidence of his anger and hatred; and then what wilt thou do with thy temptation and affliction together? All thy bones will be broken, and thy peace and strength will be gone in a moment. This may seem but as a noise of words for the present; but if ever it be thy condition, thou wilt find it to be full of woe and bitterness. Oh! then, let us strive to keep our spirits unentangled, avoiding all appearance of evil and all ways leading thereunto; especially all ways, businesses, societies, and employments that we have already found disadvantageous to us.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE NATURE, POWER, DECEIT, AND PREVALENCY

OF THE

REMAINDERS OF INDWELLING SIN IN BELIEVERS;

TOGETHER WITH

THE WAYS OF ITS WORKING AND MEANS OF PREVENTION, OPENED, EVINCED, AND APPLIED:

WITH

A RESOLUTION OF SUNDRY CASES OF CONSCIENCE THEREUNTO APPERTAINING.

"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."—Rom. vii. 24, 25.

Digitized by Google

PREFATORY NOTE.

WHILE the Government was enforcing stringent measures against Nonconformity, while Dissenting ministers if they ventured to preach the gospel of salvation became liable to the penalties of the Conventicle or Five-mile Act, and when Owen himself on a visit to some old friends at Oxford narrowly escaped arrest and imprisonment, our author did not abandon himself to inactivity, but employed the leisure of the concealment into which the rigour of the times had driven him in the preparation of some of his most valuable works. In one year (1668) the two treatises which conclude this volume were published, together with the first volume of his colossal and elaborate work, the "Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews."

His treatise on "Indwelling Sin" has always ranked high among the productions of our author. The opinion which Dr Chalmers entertained of it will be seen in the "Life of Owen," vol. i. p. lxxxiv. That such a work should have been prepared under the gloom of public trials, and the hardship of personal exposure to civil penalties, evinces not merely great industry, but a strength of religious principle with which no outward commotions were permitted to intermeddle. Temptations were strong at that time to merge all duty into a secular struggle for the rights of conscience and liberty of worship. Owen issued various tracts which had some share in securing these blessings for his country. But he was intent, with engrossing zeal, on the advancement of vital piety; and his treatise on "Indwelling Sin" is a specimen of the discourses which he preached whenever a safe opportunity occurred. It is avowedly designed for believers, to aid and guide them in the exercise of self-examination. There is uncommon subtilty of moral analysis in many of its statements,—an exposure, irksome it may be thought, in its fulness and variety, of the manifold deceitfulness of the human heart. A question may even be raised, if it be altogether a healthful process, for the mind to be conducted through this laborious and acute unvailing of the hidden mysteries of sin, and if it may not tend to exclude from the view the objective truths of the Word. But the process is in itself supremely needful,—essential to the life of faith and the growth of holiness; and with no guide can we be safer than with Owen. The reader is never suffered to lose sight of the fact, amid the most searching investigation into human motives, that our acceptance with God cannot depend upon the results of any scrutiny into our internal condition, and that the guilt of all lurking corruption which we may detect is remitted only by the blood of the cross.

The basis of the treatise is taken from Rom. vii. 21. After a brief explanation of the passage, he considers indwelling sin under the light and character of "a law;" —the seat and subject of this law, the heart;—its nature generally, as enmity against God;—its actings and operations; first, in withdrawing the mind from what is good; secondly, exciting positive opposition to God; thirdly, ensnaring the soul into captivity; and lastly, filling it with insensate hatred to the principles and claims of holiness. The power of indwelling sin is next illustrated from its deceitfulness, chap. viii. A lengthened exposition follows, of three stages along which indwelling sin may beguile us; first, when the mind is withdrawn from a course of obedience and holiness; secondly, when the affections are enticed and ensnared: and, lastly, when actual sin is conceived and committed. With chap. xiv. a new demonstration begins of the power of indwelling sin, as exhibited, first, in the lives of Christians; and, secondly, in unregenerate persons. In the last chapter evidence to the same effect is adduced from the resistance which sin offers to the authority of the moral law, and from the fruitless and unavailing endeavours of men in their own strength to subdue and mortify it. As to the way in which it is really to be mortified, the author refers to his treatise on the "Mortification of Sin."—ED.

Digitized by Google

PREFACE.

THAT the doctrine of original sin is one of the fundamental truths of our Christian profession hath been always owned in the church of God; and an especial part it is of that peculiar possession of truth which they enjoy whose religion towards God is built upon and resolved into divine revelation. As the world by its *wisdom* never knew God aright, so the wise men of it were always utterly ignorant of this inbred evil in themselves and others. With us the doctrine and conviction of it lie in the very foundation of all wherein we have to do with God, in reference unto our pleasing of him here, or obtaining the enjoyment of him hereafter. It is also known what influence it hath into the great truths concerning the person of Christ, his mediation, the fruits and effects of it, with all the benefits that we are made partakers of thereby. Without a supposition of it, not any of them can be truly known or savingly believed. For this cause hath it been largely treated of by many holy and learned men, both of old and of latter days. Some have laboured in the discovery of its *nature*, some of its *guilt* and demerit; by whom also the truth concerning it hath been vindicated from the opposition made unto it in the past and present ages. By most these things have been considered in their full extent and latitude, with respect unto all men by nature, with the estate and condition of them who are wholly under the power and guilt of it. How thereby men are disenabled and incapacitated in themselves to answer the obedience required either in the law or the gospel, so as to free themselves from the curse of the one or to make themselves partakers of the *blessing* of the other, hath been by many also fully evinced. Moreover, that there are remainders of it abiding in believers after their regeneration and conversion to God, as the Scripture abundantly testifies, so it hath been fully taught and confirmed; as also how the guilt of it is pardoned unto them, and by what means the power of it is weakened in them. All these things, I say, have been largely treated on, to the great benefit and edification of the church. In what we have now in design we therefore take them all for granted, and endeavour only farther to carry on the discovery of it in its actings and oppositions to the law and grace of God in believers. Neither do I intend the discussing of any thing that hath been controverted about it. What the Scripture plainly revealeth and teacheth concerning it,—what believers evidently find by experience in themselves,—what they may learn from the examples and acknowledgments of others, shall be represented in a way suited unto the capacity of the meanest and weakest who is concerned therein. And many things seem to render the handling of it at this season not unnecessary. The effects and fruits of it, which we see in the apostasies and backslidings of many, the scandalous sins and miscarriages of some, and the course and lives of the most, seem to call for a due consideration of it. Besides, of how great con-

Digitized by Google

cernment a full and clear acquaintance with the power of this indwelling sin (the matter designed to be opened) is unto believers, to stir them up to watchfulness and diligence, to faith and prayer, to call them to repentance, humility, and self-abasement, will appear in our progress. These, in general, were the ends aimed at in the ensuing discourse, which, being at first composed and delivered for the use and benefit of a few, is now by the providence of God made public. And if the reader receive any advantage by these weak endeavours, let him know that it is his duty, as to give glory unto God, so to help them by his prayers who in many temptations and afflictions are willing to labour in the vineyard of the Lord, unto which work they are called.

Digitized by Google

THE NATURE, POWER, DECEIT, AND PREVALENCY

OF THE

REMAINDERS OF INDWELLING SIN IN BELIEVERS.

CHAPTER I.

Indwelling sin in believers treated of by the apostle, Rom. vii. 21—The place explained.

It is of *indwelling sin*, and that in the remainders of it in persons after their conversion to God, with its power, efficacy, and effects, that we intend to treat. This also is the great design of the apostle to manifest and evince in chap. vii. of the Epistle to the Romans. Many, indeed, are the contests about the principal scope of the apostle in that chapter, and in what state the person is, under the law or under grace, whose condition he expresseth therein. I shall not at present enter into that dispute, but take that for granted which may be undeniably proved and evinced,—namely, that it is the condition of a regenerate person, with respect unto the remaining power of indwelling sin which is there proposed and exemplified, by and in the person of the apostle himself. In that discourse, therefore, of his, shall the foundation be laid of what we have to offer upon this subject. Not that I shall proceed in an exposition of his revelation of this truth as it lies in its own contexture, but only make use of what is delivered by him as occasion shall offer itself. And here first occurreth that which he affirms, verse 21: "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me."

There are four things observable in these words:—

First, The appellation he gives unto indwelling sin, whereby he expresseth its power and efficacy: it is "a law;" for that which he terms "a law" in this verse, he calls in the foregoing, "sin that dwelleth in him."

Secondly, The way whereby he came to the discovery of this law; not absolutely and in its own nature, but in himself he found it: "I find a law."

Digitized by Google

Thirdly, The frame of his soul and inward man with this law of sin, and under its discovery: "he would do good."

Fourthly, The state and activity of this law when the soul is in that frame when it would do good: it "is present with him." For what ends and purposes we shall show afterward.

The first thing observable is the compellation here used by the apostle. He calls indwelling sin "a law." It is a law.

A law is taken either properly for a *directive rule*, or improperly for an *operative effective principle*, which seems to have the force of a law. In its first sense, it is a moral rule which directs and commands, and sundry ways moves and regulates, the mind and the will as to the things which it requires or forbids. This is evidently the general nature and work of a law. Some things it commands, some things it forbids, with rewards and penalties, which move and impel men to do the one and avoid the other. Hence, in a secondary sense, an *inward principle* that moves and inclines constantly unto any actions is called a law. The principle that is in the nature of every thing, moving and carrying it towards its own end and rest, is called *the law of nature*. In this respect, every inward principle that inclineth and urgeth unto operations or actings suitable to itself is a law. So, Rom. viii. 2, the powerful and effectual working of the Spirit and grace of Christ in the hearts of believers is called "The law of the Spirit of life." And for this reason doth the apostle here call indwelling sin a law. It is a powerful and effectual indwelling principle, inclining and pressing unto actions agreeable and suitable unto its own nature. This, and no other, is the intention of the apostle in this expression: for although that term, "a law," may sometimes intend a state and condition,—and if here so used, the meaning of the words should be, "I find that this is my condition, this is the state of things with me, that 'when I would do good evil is present with me,'" which makes no great alteration in the principal intendment of the place,—yet properly it can denote nothing here but the chief subject treated of; for although the name of a law be variously used by the apostle in this chapter, yet when it relates unto sin it is nowhere applied by him to the condition of the person, but only to express either the nature or the power of sin itself. So, chap. vii. 23, "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." That which he here calls the "law of his mind," from the principal subject and seat of it, is in itself no other but the "law of the Spirit of life which is in Christ Jesus," chap. viii. 2; or the effectual power of the Spirit of grace, as was said. But "the law," as applied unto sin, hath a double sense: for as, in the first place, "I see a law in my members," it denotes the being and nature of

Digitized by Google

sin; so, in the latter, "Leading into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members," it signifies its power and efficacy. And both these are comprised in the same name, singly used, chap. vii. 21. Now, that which we observe from this name or term of a "law" attributed unto sin is, That *there is an exceeding efficacy and power in the remainders of indwelling sin in believers, with a constant working towards evil.*

Thus it is in believers; it is a law even *in them*, though not *to them*. Though its rule be broken, its strength weakened and impaired, its root mortified, yet it is a law still of great force and efficacy. There, where it is least felt, it is most powerful. Carnal men, in reference unto spiritual and moral duties, are nothing but this law; they do nothing but from it and by it. It is in them a ruling and prevailing principle of all moral actions, with reference unto a supernatural and eternal end. I shall not consider it in them in whom it hath most power, but in them in whom its power is chiefly discovered and discerned,—that is, in believers; in the others only in order to the farther conviction and manifestation thereof.

Secondly, The apostle proposeth the way whereby he discovered this law in himself: Εὑρίσκω ἄρα τὸν νόμον, "I find then," or therefore, "a law." He *found* it. It had been *told* him there was such a law; it had been *preached* unto him. This convinced him that there was a law of sin. But it is one thing for a man to know in general that there is a law of sin; another thing for a man to have an experience of the power of this law of sin in himself. It is preached to all; all men that own the Scripture acknowledge it, as being declared therein. But they are but few that know it in themselves; we should else have more complaints of it than we have, and more contendings against it, and less fruits of it in the world. But this is that which the apostle affirms,—not that the doctrine of it had been preached unto him, but that he found it by experience in himself. "I find a law;"—"I have experience of its power and efficacy." For a man to find his sickness, and danger thereon from its effects, is another thing than to hear a discourse about a disease from its causes. And this experience is the great preservative of all divine truth in the soul. This it is to know a thing indeed, in reality, to know it for ourselves, when, as we are taught it from the word, so we find it in ourselves. Hence we observe, *secondly, Believers have experience of the power and efficacy of indwelling sin.* They *find* it in themselves; they find it as a *law*. It hath a self-evidencing efficacy to them that are alive to discern it. They that find not its power are under its dominion. Whosoever contend against it shall know and find that it is present with them, that it is powerful in them. He shall find the stream to be strong who swims against it, though he who rolls along with it be insensible of it.

Digitized by Google

Thirdly, The general frame of believers, notwithstanding the inhabitation of this law of sin, is here also expressed. They "would do good." This law is "present:" Θέλοντι ἐμοὶ ποιεῖν τὸ καλόν. The habitual inclination of their will is unto good. The law *in* them is not a law *unto* them, as it is to unbelievers. They are not *wholly* obnoxious to its power, nor *morally* unto its commands. Grace hath the sovereignty in their souls: this gives them a will unto good. They "would do good," that is, always and constantly. 1 John iii. 9, Ποιεῖν ἁμαρτίαν, "To commit sin," is to make a trade of sin, to make it a man's business to sin. So it is said a believer "doth not commit sin;" and so ποιεῖν τὸ καλόν, "to do that which is good." To will to do so is to have the habitual bent and inclination of the will set on that which is good,—that is, morally and spiritually good, which is the proper subject treated of: whence is our *third* observation,—*There is, and there is through grace, kept up in believers a constant and ordinarily prevailing will of doing good, notwithstanding the power and efficacy of indwelling sin to the contrary.*

This, in their *worst* condition, distinguisheth them from unbelievers in their *best*. The will in unbelievers is under the power of the law of sin. The opposition they make to sin, either in the root or branches of it, is from their light and their consciences; the will of sinning in them is never taken away. Take away all other considerations and hinderances, whereof we shall treat afterward, and they would sin willingly always. Their faint endeavours to answer their convictions are far from a will of doing that which is good. They will plead, indeed, that they would leave their sins if they could, and they would fain do better than they do. But it is the working of their light and convictions, not any spiritual inclination of their wills, which they intend by that expression: for where there is a will of doing good, there is a choice of that which is good for its own excellency's sake,—because it is desirable and suitable to the soul, and therefore to be preferred before that which is contrary. Now, this is not in any unbelievers. They do not, they cannot, so choose that which is spiritually good, nor is it so excellent or suitable unto any principle that is in them; only they have some desires to attain that end whereunto that which is good doth lead, and to avoid that evil which the neglect of it tends unto. And these also are for the most part so weak and languid in many of them, that they put them not upon any considerable endeavours. Witness that luxury, sloth, worldliness, and security, that the generality of men are even drowned in. But in believers there is a will of doing good, an habitual disposition and inclination in their wills unto that which is spiritually good; and where this is, it is accompanied with answerable effects. The will is the principle of our moral actions; and therefore unto the prevailing

Digitized by Google

disposition thereof will the general course of our actings be suited. Good things will proceed from the good treasures of the heart. Nor can this disposition be evidenced to be in any but by its fruits. A will of doing good, without doing good, is but pretended.

Fourthly, There is yet another thing remaining in these words of the apostle, arising from that respect that the presence of sin hath unto the time and season of duty: "When I would do good," saith he, "evil is present with me."

There are two things to be considered in the will of doing good that is in believers:—

1. There is its *habitual residence* in them. They have always an habitual inclination of will unto that which is good. And this habitual preparation for good is always present with them; as the apostle expresses it, verse 18 of this chapter.

2. There are especial *times and seasons* for the exercise of that principle. There is a "When I would do good,"—a season wherein this or that good, this or that duty, is to be performed and accomplished suitably unto the habitual preparation and inclination of the will.

Unto these two there are two things in indwelling sin opposed. To the gracious principle residing in the will, inclining unto that which is spiritually good, it is opposed as it is a law,—that is, a *contrary principle*, inclining unto evil, with an aversation from that which is good. Unto the second, or the actual willing of this or that good in particular, unto this "When I would do good," is opposed the presence of this law: "Evil is present with me,"—Ἐμοὶ τὸ κακὸν παράκειται evil is at hand, and ready to oppose the actual accomplishment of the good aimed at. Whence, *fourthly, Indwelling sin is effectually operative in rebelling and inclining to evil, when the will of doing good is in a particular manner active and inclining unto obedience.*

And this is the description of him who is a believer and a sinner, as every one who is the former is the latter also. These are the contrary principles and the contrary operations that are in him. The principles are, a *will of doing good* on the one hand, from grace, and a law of sin on the other. Their adverse actings and operations are insinuated in these expressions: "When I would do good, evil is present with me." And these both are more fully expressed by the apostle, Gal. v. 17, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that I cannot do the things that I would."

And here lie the springs of the whole course of our obedience. An acquaintance with these several principles and their actings is the principal part of our wisdom. They are upon the matter, next to

Digitized by Google

the free grace of God in our justification by the blood of Christ, the only things wherein the glory of God and our own souls are concerned. These are the springs of our holiness and our sins, of our joys and troubles, of our refreshments and sorrows. It is, then, all our concernments to be thoroughly acquainted with these things, who intend to walk with God and to glorify him in this world.

And hence we may see what wisdom is required in the guiding and management of our hearts and ways before God. Where the subjects of a ruler are in feuds and oppositions one against another, unless great wisdom be used in the government of the whole, all things will quickly be ruinous in that state. There are these contrary principles in the hearts of believers. And if they labour not to be spiritually wise, how shall they be able to steer their course aright? Many men live in the dark to themselves all their days; whatever else they know, they know not themselves. They know their outward estates, how rich they are, and the condition of their bodies as to health and sickness they are careful to examine; but as to their inward man, and their principles as to God and eternity, they know little or nothing of themselves. Indeed, few labour to grow wise in this matter, few study themselves as they ought, are acquainted with the evils of their own hearts as they ought; on which yet the whole course of their obedience, and consequently of their eternal condition, doth depend. This, therefore, is our wisdom; and it is a needful wisdom, if we have any design to please God, or to avoid that which is a provocation to the eyes of his glory.

We shall find, also, in our inquiry hereinto, what diligence and watchfulness is required unto a Christian conversation. There is a constant enemy unto it in every one's own heart; and what an enemy it is we shall afterward show, for this is our design, to discover him to the uttermost. In the meantime, we may well bewail the woful sloth and negligence that is in the most, even in professors. They live and walk as though they intended to go to heaven hood-winked and asleep, as though they had no enemy to deal withal. Their mistake, therefore, and folly will be fully laid open in our progress.

That which I shall principally fix upon, in reference unto our present design, from this place of the apostle, is that which was first laid down,—namely, that there is an exceeding efficacy and power in the remainder of indwelling sin in believers, with a constant inclination and working towards evil.

Awake, therefore, all of you in whose hearts is any thing of the ways of God! Your enemy is not only *upon* you, as on Samson of old, but is *in* you also. He is at work, by all ways of force and craft, as we shall see. Would you not dishonour God and his gospel; would you not scandalize the saints and ways of God; would you not

Digitized by Google

wound your consciences and endanger your souls; would you not grieve the good and holy Spirit of God, the author of all your comforts; would you keep your garments undefiled, and escape the woful temptations and pollutions of the days wherein we live; would you be preserved from the number of the apostates in these latter days;—awake to the consideration of this cursed enemy, which is the spring of all these and innumerable other evils, as also of the ruin of all the souls that perish in this world!

CHAPTER II.

Indwelling sin a law—In what sense it is so called—What kind of law it is—An inward effective principle called a law—The power of sin thence evinced.

THAT which we have proposed unto consideration is the power and efficacy of indwelling sin. The ways whereby it may be evinced are many. I shall begin with the *appellation* of it in the place before mentioned. It is a law. "I find a law," saith the apostle. It is because of its power and efficacy that it is so called. So is also the principle of grace in believers the "law of the Spirit of life," as we observed before, Rom. viii. 2; which is the "exceeding greatness of the power of God" in them, Eph. i. 19. Where there is a law there is power.

We shall, therefore, show both what belongs unto it as it is a law in general, and also what is peculiar or proper in it as being such a law as we have described.

There are in general two things attending every law, as such:—

First, *Dominion.* Rom. vii. 1, "The law hath dominion over a man whilst he liveth:" Κυριεύει τοῦ ἀνθρώπου·—"It lordeth it over a man." Where any law takes place, κυριεύει, it hath dominion. It is properly the act of a superior, and it belongs to its nature to exact obedience by way of dominion. Now, there is a twofold dominion, as there is a twofold law. There is a *moral authoritative* dominion over a man, and there is a *real effective* dominion in a man. The first is an affection of the law of God, the latter of the law of sin. The law of sin hath not in itself a moral dominion,—it hath not a rightful dominion or authority over any man; but it hath that which is equivalent unto it; whence it is said βασιλεύειν, "to reign as a king," Rom. vi. 12, and κυριεύειν, "to lord it," or have dominion, verse 14, as a law in general is said to have, chap. vii. 1. But because it hath lost its complete dominion in reference unto believers, of whom alone we speak, I

Digitized by Google

shall not insist upon it in this utmost extent of its power. But even in them it is a law still; though not a law unto them, yet, as was said, it is a law in them. And though it have not a complete, and, as it were, a rightful dominion over them, yet it will have a domination as to some things in them. It is still a law, and that in them; so that all its actings are the actings of a law,—that is, it acts with power, though it have lost its complete power of ruling in them. Though it be *weakened*, yet its nature is not *changed*. It is a law still, and therefore powerful. And as its particular workings, which we shall afterward consider, are the ground of this appellation, so the term itself teacheth us in general what we are to expect from it, and what endeavours it will use for dominion, to which it hath been accustomed.

Secondly, A law, as a law, hath *an efficacy to provoke* those that are obnoxious unto it unto the things that it requireth. A law hath rewards and punishments accompanying of it. These secretly prevail on them to whom they are proposed, though the things commanded be not much desirable. And generally all laws have their efficacy on the minds of men, from the rewards and punishments that are annexed unto them. Nor is this law without this spring of power: it hath its rewards and punishments. The pleasures of sin are the rewards of sin; a reward that most men lose their souls to obtain. By this the law of sin contended in Moses against the law of grace. Heb. xi. 25, 26, "He chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; for he looked unto the recompense of reward." The contest was in his mind between the law of sin and the law of grace. The motive on the part of the law of sin, wherewith it sought to draw him over, and wherewith it prevails on the most, was the reward that it proposed unto him,—namely, that he should have the present enjoyment of the pleasures of sin. By this it contended against the reward annexed unto the law of grace, called "the recompense of reward."

By this *sorry reward* doth this law keep the world in obedience to its commands; and experience shows us of what power it is to influence the minds of men. It hath also punishments that it threatens men with who labour to cast off its yoke. Whatever evil, trouble, or danger in the world, attends gospel obedience,—whatever hardship or violence is to be offered to the sensual part of our natures in a strict course of mortification,—sin makes use of, as if they were punishments attending the neglect of its commands. By these it prevails on the "fearful," who shall have no share in life eternal, Rev. xxi. 8. And it is hard to say by whether of these, its pretended rewards or pretended punishments, it doth most prevail, in whether of them its greatest strength doth lie. By its rewards it enticeth men

Digitized by Google

to sins of commission, as they are called, in ways and actions tending to the satisfaction of its lusts. By its punishments it induceth men to the omitting of duties; a course tending to no less a pernicious event than the former. By which of these the law of sin hath its greatest success in and upon the souls of men is not evident; and that because they are seldom or never separated, but equally take place on the same persons. But this is certain, that by tenders and promises of the pleasures of sin on the one hand, by threats of the deprivation of all sensual contentments and the infliction of temporal evils on the other, it hath an exceeding efficacy on the minds of men, oftentimes on believers themselves. Unless a man be prepared to reject the reasonings that will offer themselves from the one and the other of these, there is no standing before the *power* of the law. The world falls before them every day. With what deceit and violence they are urged and imposed on the minds of men we shall afterward declare; as also what advantages they have to prevail upon them. Look on the generality of men, and you shall find them wholly by these means at sin's disposal. Do the profits and pleasures of sin lie before them?—nothing can withhold them from reaching after them. Do difficulties and inconveniences attend the duties of the gospel?—they will have nothing to do with them; and so are wholly given up to the rule and dominion of this law.

And this light in general we have into the power and efficacy of indwelling sin from the general nature of a law, whereof it is partaker.

We may consider, nextly, what *kind of law* in particular it is; which will farther evidence that power of it which we are inquiring after. It is not an outward, written, commanding, directing law, but an inbred, working, impelling, urging law. A law *proposed* unto us is not to be compared, for efficacy, to a law *inbred* in us. Adam had a law of sin proposed to him in his temptation; but because he had no law of sin inbred and working in him, he might have withstood it. An inbred law must needs be effectual. Let us take an example from that law which is contrary to this law of sin. The law of God was at first inbred and natural unto man; it was concreated with his faculties, and was their rectitude, both in being and operation, in reference to his end of living unto God and glorifying of him. Hence it had an especial power in the whole soul to enable it unto all obedience, yea, and to make all obedience easy and pleasant. Such is the power of an inbred law. And though this law, as to the rule and dominion of it, be now by nature cast out of the soul, yet the remaining sparks of it, because they are inbred, are very powerful and effectual; as the apostle declares, Rom. ii. 14, 15. Afterward God renews this law, and writes it in tables of stone. But what is the efficacy of this law? Will it now, as it is external and proposed unto men,

Digitized by Google

enable them to perform the things that it exacts and requires? Not at all. God knew it would not, unless it were turned to an internal law again; that is, until, of a moral outward rule, it be turned into an inward real principle. Wherefore God makes his law internal again, and implants it on the heart as it was at first, when he intends to give it power to produce obedience in his people: Jer. xxxi. 31–33, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." This is that which God fixeth on, as it were, upon a discovery of the insufficiency of an outward law leading men unto obedience. "The written law," saith he, "will not do it; mercies and deliverances from distress will not effect it; trials and afflictions will not accomplish it. Then," saith the Lord, "will I take another course: I will turn the *written law* into an internal *living principle* in their hearts; and that will have such an efficacy as shall assuredly make them my people, and keep them so." Now, such is this law of sin. It is an indwelling law: Rom. vii. 17, "It is sin that dwelleth in me;" verse 20, "Sin that dwelleth in me;" verse 21, "It is present with me;" verse 23, "It is in my members;"—yea, it is so far in a man, as in some sense it is said to be the man himself; verse 18, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing." The flesh, which is the seat and throne of this law, yea, which indeed is this law, is in some sense the man himself, as grace also is the new man. Now, from this consideration of it, that it is an indwelling law inclining and moving to sin, as an inward habit or principle, it hath sundry advantages increasing its strength and furthering its power; as,—

1. It always *abides* in the soul,—it is never absent. The apostle twice useth that expression, "It dwelleth in me." There is its constant residence and habitation. If it came upon the soul only at certain seasons, much obedience might be perfectly accomplished in its absence; yea, and as they deal with usurping tyrants, whom they intend to thrust out of a city, the gates might be sometimes shut against it, that it might not return,—the soul might fortify itself against it. But the soul is its home; there it dwells, and is no wanderer. Wherever you are, whatever you are about, this law of sin is always in you; in the best that you do, and in the worst. Men little consider what a dangerous companion is always at home with them. When they are in company, when alone, by night or by day, all is one, sin is with them. There is a living coal continually in their houses; which, if it be not looked unto, will fire them, and it may be consume them. Oh, the woful security of poor souls! How little do the most of men think of this inbred enemy that is never from home! How little, for the most part, doth the watchfulness of any professors answer the danger of their state and condition!

Digitized by Google

2. It is always *ready* to apply itself to every end and purpose that it serves unto. "It doth not only dwell in me," saith the apostle, "but when I would do good, it is present with me." There is somewhat more in that expression than mere indwelling. An inmate may dwell in a house, and yet not be always meddling with what the good-man of the house hath to do (that so we may keep to the allusion of indwelling, used by the apostle): but it is so with this law, it doth so dwell in us, as that it will be present with us in every thing we do; yea, oftentimes when with most earnestness we desire to be quit of it, with most violence it will put itself upon us: "When I would do good, it is present with me." Would you pray, would you hear, would you give alms, would you meditate, would you be in any duty acting faith on God and love towards him, would you work righteousness, would you resist temptations,—this troublesome, perplexing indweller will still more or less put itself upon you and be present with you; so that you cannot perfectly and completely accomplish the thing that is good, as our apostle speaks, verse 18. Sometimes men, by hearkening to their temptations, do stir up, excite, and provoke their lusts; and no wonder if then they find them present and active. But it will be so when with all our endeavours we labour to be free from them. This law of sin "dwelleth" in us;—that is, it adheres as a depraved principle, unto our minds in darkness and vanity, unto our affections in sensuality, unto our wills in a loathing of and aversation from that which is good; and by some, more, or all of these, is continually putting itself upon us, in inclinations, motions, or suggestions to evil, when we would be most gladly quit of it.

3. It being an indwelling law, it applies itself to its work with great *facility* and easiness, like "the sin that doth so easily beset us," Heb. xii. 1. It hath a great facility and easiness in the application of itself unto its work; it needs no doors to be opened unto it; it needs no engines to work by. The soul cannot apply itself to any duty of a man but it must be by the exercise of those faculties wherein this law hath its residence. Is the understanding or the *mind* to be applied unto any thing?—there it is, in ignorance, darkness, vanity, folly, madness. Is the *will* to be engaged?—there it is also, in spiritual deadness, stubbornness, and the roots of obstinacy. Is the heart and *affections* to be set on work?—there it is, in inclinations to the world and present things, and sensuality, with proneness to all manner of defilements. Hence it is easy for it to insinuate itself into all that we do, and to hinder all that is good, and to further all sin and wickedness. It hath an intimacy, an inwardness with the soul; and therefore, in all that we do, doth easily beset us. It possesseth those very faculties of the soul whereby we must do what we do, whatever it

Digitized by Google

be, good or evil. Now, all these advantages it hath as it is a law, as an indwelling law, which manifests its power and efficacy. It is always resident in the soul, it puts itself upon all its actings, and that with easiness and facility.

This is that law which the apostle affirms that he found in himself; this is the title that he gives unto the powerful and effectual remainder of indwelling sin even in believers; and these general evidences of its power, from that appellation, have we. Many there are in the world who find not this law in them,—who, whatever they have been taught in the word, have not a spiritual sense and experience of the power of indwelling sin; and that because they are wholly under the dominion of it. They find not that there is darkness and folly in their minds; because they are darkness itself, and darkness will discover nothing. They find not deadness and an indisposition in their hearts and wills to God; because they are dead wholly in trespasses and sins. They are at peace with their lusts, by being in bondage unto them. And this is the state of most men in the world; which makes them wofully despise all their eternal concernments. Whence is it that men follow and pursue the world with so much greediness, that they neglect heaven, and life, and immortality for it, every day? Whence is it that some pursue their sensuality with delight?—they will drink and revel, and have their sports, let others say what they please. Whence is it that so many live so unprofitably under the word, that they understand so little of what is spoken unto them, that they practise less of what they understand, and will by no means be stirred up to answer the mind of God in his calls unto them? It is all from this law of sin and the power of it, that rules and bears sway in men, that all these things do proceed; but it is not such persons of whom at present we particularly treat.

From what hath been spoken it will ensue, that, if there be such a law in believers, it is doubtless their duty to find it out, to find it so to be.

The more they find its power, the less they will feel its effects. It will not at all advantage a man to have an hectical distemper and not to discover it,—a fire lying secretly in his house and not to know it. So much as men find of this law in them, so much they will abhor it and themselves, and no more. Proportionably also to their discovery of it will be their earnestness for grace, nor will it rise higher. All watchfulness and diligence in obedience will be answerable also thereunto. Upon this one hinge, or finding out and experiencing the power and the efficacy of this law of sin, turns the whole course of our lives. Ignorance of it breeds senselessness, carelessness, sloth, security, and pride; all which the Lord's soul abhors. Eruptions into great, open, conscience-wasting, scandalous sins, are

Digitized by Google

from want of a due spiritual consideration of this law. Inquire, then, how it is with your souls. What do you find of this law? what experience have you of its power and efficacy? Do you find it dwelling in you, always present with you, exciting itself, or putting forth its poison with facility and easiness at all times, in all your duties, "when you would do good?" What humiliation, what self-abasement, what intenseness in prayer, what diligence, what watchfulness, doth this call for at your hands! What spiritual wisdom do you stand in need of! What supplies of grace, what assistance of the Holy Ghost, will be hence also discovered! I fear we have few of us a diligence proportionable to our danger.

CHAPTER III.

The seat or subject of the law of sin, the heart—What meant thereby—Properties of the heart as possessed by sin, unsearchable, deceitful—Whence that deceit ariseth—Improvement of these considerations.

HAVING manifested indwelling sin, whereof we treat in the remainders of it in believers, to be a law, and evinced in general the power of it from thence, we shall now proceed to give particular instances of its efficacy and advantages from some things that generally relate unto it as such. And these are three:—FIRST, Its *seat* and subject; SECONDLY, Its *natural* properties; and, THIRDLY, Its *operations* and the manner thereof;—which principally we aim at and shall attend unto.

FIRST, For the *seat* and subject of this law of sin, the Scripture everywhere assigns it to be the *heart*. There indwelling sin keeps its especial residence. It hath invaded and possessed the throne of God himself: Eccles. ix. 3, "Madness is in the heart of men while they live." This is their madness, or the root of all that madness which appears in their lives. Matt. xv. 19, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies," etc. There are many outward temptations and provocations that befall men, which excite and stir them up unto these evils; but they do but as it were open the vessel, and let out what is laid up and stored in it. The root, rise, and spring of all these things is in the heart. Temptations and occasions put nothing into a man, but only draw out what was in him before. Hence is that summary description of the whole work and effect of this law of sin, Gen. vi. 5, "Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart

Digitized by Google

is only evil continually;" so also chap. viii. 21. The whole work of the law of sin, from its first rise, its first coining of actual sin, is here described. And its seat, its work-house, is said to be the heart; and so it is called by our Saviour "The evil treasure of the heart:" Luke vi. 45, "An evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth evil things." This treasure is the prevailing principle of moral actions that is in men. So, in the beginning of the verse, our Saviour calls grace "The good treasure of the heart" of a good man, whence that which is good doth proceed. It is a principle constantly and abundantly inciting and stirring up unto, and consequently bringing forth, actions conformable and like unto it, of the same kind and nature with itself. And it is also called a treasure for its abundance. It will never be exhausted; it is not wasted by men's spending on it; yea, the more lavish men are of this stock, the more they draw out of this treasure, the more it grows and abounds! As men do not spend their grace, but increase it, by its exercise, no more do they their indwelling sin. The more men exercise their grace in duties of obedience, the more it is strengthened and increased; and the more men exert and put forth the fruits of their lust, the more is that enraged and increased in them;—it feeds upon itself, swallows up its own poison, and grows thereby. The more men sin, the more are they inclined unto sin. It is from the deceitfulness of this law of sin, whereof we shall speak afterward at large, that men persuade themselves that by this or that particular sin they shall so satisfy their lusts as that they shall need to sin no more. Every sin increaseth the *principle*, and fortifieth the habit of sinning. It is an evil treasure, that increaseth by doing evil. And where doth this treasure lie? It is in the heart; there it is laid up, there it is kept in safety. All the men in the world, all the angels in heaven, cannot dispossess a man of this treasure, it is so safely stored in the heart.

The *heart* in the Scripture is variously used; sometimes for the *mind and understanding*, sometimes for the *will*, sometimes for the *affections*, sometimes for the *conscience*, sometimes for the *whole soul*. Generally, it denotes *the whole soul of man* and all the faculties of it, not absolutely, but as they are all one principle of moral operations, as they all concur in our doing good or evil. The mind, as it inquireth, discerneth, and judgeth what is to be done, what refused; the will, as it chooseth or refuseth and avoids; the affections, as they like or dislike, cleave to or have an aversation from, that which is proposed to them; the conscience, as it warns and determines,—are all together called the *heart*. And in this sense it is that we say the seat and subject of this law of sin is the heart of man. Only, we may add that the Scripture, speaking of the heart as the principle

Digitized by Google

of men's good or evil actions, doth usually insinuate together with it two things belonging unto the manner of their performance:—

1. A *suitableness* and pleasingness unto the soul in the things that are done. When men take delight and are pleased in and with what they do, they are said to do it heartily, with their whole hearts. Thus, when God himself blesseth his people in love and delight, he says he doth it "with his whole heart, and with his whole soul," Jer. xxxii. 41.

2. *Resolution* and *constancy* in such actions. And this also is denoted in the metaphorical expression before used of a treasure, from whence men do constantly take out the things which either they stand in need of or do intend to use.

This is the subject, the seat, the dwelling-place of this law of sin,—the heart; as it is the entire principle of moral operations, of doing good or evil, as out of it proceed good or evil. Here dwells our enemy; this is the fort, the citadel of this tyrant, where it maintains a rebellion against God all our days. Sometimes it hath more strength, and consequently more success; sometimes less of the one and of the other; but it is always in rebellion whilst we live.

That we may in our passage take a little view of the strength and power of sin from this seat and subject of it, we may consider one or two properties of the heart that exceedingly contribute thereunto. It is like an enemy in war, whose strength and power lie not only in his numbers and force of men or arms, but also in the unconquerable forts that he doth possess. And such is the heart to this enemy of God and our souls; as will appear from the properties of it, whereof one or two shall be mentioned.

1. It is *unsearchable:* Jer. xvii. 9, 10, "Who can know the heart? I the LORD search it." The heart of man is pervious to God only; hence he takes the honour of searching the heart to be as peculiar to himself, and as fully declaring him to be God, as any other glorious attribute of his nature. We know not the hearts of one another; we know not our own hearts as we ought. Many there are that know not their hearts as to their general bent and disposition, whether it be good or bad, sincere and sound, or corrupt and naught; but no one knows all the secret intrigues, the windings and turnings, the actings and aversations of his own heart. Hath any one the perfect measure of his own light and darkness? Can any one know what actings of choosing or aversation his will will bring forth, upon the proposal of that endless variety of objects that it is to be exercised with? Can any one traverse the various mutability of his affections? Do the secret springs of acting and refusing in the soul lie before the eyes of any man? Doth any one know what will be the motions of the mind or will in such and such conjunctions of things, such a suiting of objects, such a pretension of reasonings, such an appearance of things

Digitized by Google

desirable? All in heaven and earth, but the infinite, all-seeing God, are utterly ignorant of these things. In this unsearchable heart dwells the law of sin; and much of its security, and consequently of its strength, lies in this, that it is past our finding out. We fight with an enemy whose secret strength we cannot discover, whom we cannot follow into its retirements. Hence, oftentimes, when we are ready to think sin quite ruined, after a while we find it was but out of sight. It hath coverts and retreats in an unsearchable heart, whither we cannot pursue it. The soul may persuade itself all is well, when sin may be safe in the hidden darkness of the mind, which it is impossible that he should look into; for whatever makes manifest is light. It may suppose the will of sinning is utterly taken away, when yet there is an unsearchable reserve for a more suitable object, a more vigorous temptation, than at present it is tried withal. Hath a man had a contest with any lust, and a blessed victory over it by the Holy Ghost as to that present trial?—when he thinks it is utterly expelled, he ere long finds that it was but retired out of sight. It can lie so close in the mind's darkness, in the will's indisposition, in the disorder and carnality of the affections, that no eye can discover it. The best of our wisdom is but to watch its first appearances, to catch its first under-earth heavings and workings, and to set ourselves in opposition to them; for to follow it into the secret corners of the heart, that we cannot do. It is true, there is yet a relief in this case,—namely, that he to whom the work of destroying the law of sin and body of death in us is principally committed, namely, the Holy Ghost, comes with his axe to the very root; neither is there any thing in an unsearchable heart that is not "naked and open unto him," Heb. iv. 13; but we in a way of duty may hence see what an enemy we have to deal withal.

2. As it is unsearchable, so it is *deceitful*, as in the place above mentioned: "It is deceitful above all things,"—incomparably so. There is great deceit in the dealings of men in the world; great deceit in their counsels and contrivances in reference to their affairs, private and public; great deceit in their words and actings: the world is full of deceit and fraud. But all this is nothing to the deceit that is in man's heart towards himself; for that is the meaning of the expression in this place, and not towards others. Now, incomparable deceitfulness, added to unsearchableness, gives a great addition and increase of strength to the law of sin, upon the account of its seat and subject. I speak not yet of the deceitfulness of sin itself, but the deceitfulness of the heart where it is seated. Prov. xxvi. 25, "There are seven abominations in the heart;" that is, not only many, but an absolute complete number, as seven denotes. And they are such abominations as consist in deceitfulness; so the caution foregoing in-

Digitized by Google

sinuates, "Trust him not:" for it is only deceit that should make us not to trust in that degree and measure which the object is capable of.

Now, this deceitfulness of the heart, whereby it is exceedingly advantaged in its harbouring of sin, lies chiefly in these two things:—

(1.) That it abounds in *contradictions*, so that it is not to be found and dealt withal according to any constant rule and way of procedure. There are some men that have much of this, from their natural constitution, or from other causes, in their conversation. They seem to be made up of contradictions; sometimes to be very wise in their affairs, sometimes very foolish; very open, and very reserved; very facile, and very obstinate; very easy to be entreated, and very revengeful,—all in a remarkable height. This is generally accounted a bad character, and is seldom found but when it proceeds from some notable predominant lust. But, in general, in respect of moral good or evil, duty or sin, it is so with the heart of every man,—flaming hot, and key cold; weak, and yet stubborn; obstinate, and facile. The frame of the heart is ready to contradict itself every moment. Now you would think you had it all for such a frame, such a way; anon it is quite otherwise: so that none know what to expect from it. The rise of this is the disorder that is brought upon all its faculties by sin. God created them all in a perfect harmony and union. The mind and reason were in perfect subjection and subordination to God and his will; the will answered, in its choice of good, the discovery made of it by the mind; the affections constantly and evenly followed the understanding and will. The mind's subjection to God was the spring of the orderly and harmonious motion of the soul and all the wheels in it. That being disturbed by sin, the rest of the faculties move cross and contrary one to another. The will chooseth not the good which the mind discovers; the affections delight not in that which the will chooseth; but all jar and interfere, cross and rebel against each other. This we have got by our falling from God. Hence sometimes the will leads, the judgment follows. Yea, commonly the affections, that should attend upon all, get the sovereignty, and draw the whole soul captive after them. And hence it is, as I said, that the heart is made up of so many contradictions in its actings. Sometimes the mind retains its sovereignty, and the affections are in subjection, and the will ready for its duty. This puts a good face upon things. Immediately the rebellion of the affections or the obstinacy of the will takes place and prevails, and the whole scene is changed. This, I say, makes the heart deceitful above all things: it agrees not at all in itself, is not constant to itself, hath no order that it is constant unto, is under no certain conduct that is stable; but, if I may so say, hath a rotation in itself, where ofttimes the feet lead and guide the whole.

Digitized by Google

(2.) Its deceit lies in its *full promisings* upon the first appearance of things; and this also proceeds from the same principle with the former. Sometimes the affections are touched and wrought upon; the whole heart appears in a fair frame; all promiseth to be well. Within a while the whole frame is changed; the mind was not at all affected or turned; the affections a little acted their parts and are gone off, and all the fair promises of the heart are departed with them. Now, add this deceitfulness to the unsearchableness before mentioned, and we shall find that at least the difficulty of dealing effectually with sin in its seat and throne will be exceedingly increased. A deceiving and a deceived heart, who can deal with it?—especially considering that the heart employs all its deceits unto the service of sin, contributes them all to its furtherance. All the disorder that is in the heart, all its false promises and fair appearances, promote the interest and advantages of sin. Hence God cautions the people to look to it, lest their own hearts should entice and deceive them.

Who can mention the treacheries and deceits that lie in the heart of man? It is not for nothing that the Holy Ghost so expresseth it, "It is deceitful above all things,"—uncertain in what it doth, and false in what it promiseth. And hence moreover it is, amongst other causes, that, in the pursuit of our war against sin, we have not only the old work to go over and over, but new work still while we live in this world, still new stratagems and wiles to deal withal; as the manner will be where unsearchableness and deceitfulness are to be contended with.

There are many other properties of this seat and subject of the law of sin which might be insisted on to the same end and purpose, but that would too far divert us from our particular design, and therefore I shall pass these over with some few considerations:—

First, Never let us reckon that our work in contending against sin, in crucifying, mortifying, and subduing of it, is at an end. The place of its habitation is unsearchable; and when we may think that we have thoroughly won the field, there is still some reserve remaining that we saw not, that we knew not of. Many conquerors have been ruined by their carelessness after a victory, and many have been spiritually wounded after great successes against this enemy. David was so; his great surprisal into sin was after a long profession, manifold experiences of God, and watchful keeping himself from his iniquity. And hence, in part, hath it come to pass that the profession of many hath declined in their old age or riper time; which must more distinctly be spoken to afterward. They have given over the work of mortifying of sin before their work was at an end. There is no way for us to pursue sin in its unsearchable habitation but by being end-

Digitized by Google

less in our pursuit. And that command of the apostle which we have, Col. iii. 5, on this account is as necessary for them to observe who are towards the end of their race, as those that are but at the beginning of it: "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth;" be always doing it whilst you live in this world. It is true, great ground is obtained when the work is vigorously and constantly carried on; sin is much weakened, so that the soul presseth forwards towards perfection: but yet the work must be endless; I mean, whilst we are in this world. If we give over, we shall quickly see this enemy exerting itself with new strength and vigour. It may be under some great affliction, it may be in some eminent enjoyment of God, in the sense of the sweetness of blessed communion with Christ, we have been ready to say that there was an end of sin, that it was dead and gone for ever; but have we not found the contrary by experience? hath it not manifested that it was only retired into some unsearchable recesses of the heart, as to its in-being and nature, though, it may be, greatly weakened in its power? Let us, then, reckon on it, that there is no way to have our work done but by always doing of it; and he who dies fighting in this warfare dies assuredly a conqueror.

Secondly, Hath it its residence in that which is *various, inconstant, deceitful* above all things? This calls for perpetual watchfulness against it. An open enemy, that deals by violence only, always gives some respite. You know where to have him and what he is doing, so as that sometimes you may sleep quietly without fear. But against adversaries that deal by deceit and treachery (which are long swords, and reach at the greatest distance) nothing will give security but perpetual watchfulness. It is impossible we should in this case be too jealous, doubtful, suspicious, or watchful. The heart hath a thousand wiles and deceits; and if we are in the least off from our watch, we may be sure to be surprised. Hence are those reiterated commands and cautions given for watching, for being circumspect, diligent, careful, and the like. There is no living for them who have to deal with an enemy deceitful above all things, unless they persist in such a frame. All cautions that are given in this case are necessary, especially that, "Remember not to believe." Doth the heart promise fair?—rest not on it, but say to the Lord Christ, "Lord, do thou undertake for me." Doth the sun shine fair in the morning?—reckon not therefore on a fair day; the clouds may arise and fall. Though the morning give a fair appearance of serenity and peace, turbulent affections may arise, and cloud the soul with sin and darkness.

Thirdly then, commit the whole matter with all care and diligence unto *Him who can search the heart* to the uttermost, and knows how to prevent all its treacheries and deceits. In the things before men-

Digitized by Google

tioned lies our duty, but here lies our safety. There is no treacherous corner in our hearts but he can search it to the uttermost; there is no deceit in them but he can disappoint it. This course David takes, Ps. cxxxix. After he had set forth the omnipresence of God and his omniscience, verses 1–10, he makes improvement of it: verse 23, "Search me, O God, and try me." As if he had said, "It is but a little that I know of my deceitful heart, only I would be *sincere;* I would not have reserves for sin retained therein. Wherefore, do thou, who art present with my heart, who knowest my thoughts long before, undertake this work, perform it thoroughly, for thou alone art able so to do."

There are yet other arguments for the evidencing of the power and strength of indwelling sin, from whence it is termed a "law," which we must pass through, according to the order wherein before we laid them down.

CHAPTER IV.

Indwelling sin enmity against God—Thence its power—Admits of no peace nor rest—Is against God himself—Acts itself in aversation from God, and propensity to evil—Is universal—To all of God—In all of the soul—Constant.

SECONDLY. WE have seen the seat and subject of this law of sin. In the next place we might take a view of its *nature* in general, which also will manifest its power and efficacy; but this I shall not enlarge upon, it being not my business to declare the nature of indwelling sin: it hath also been done by others. I shall therefore only, in reference unto our special design in hand, consider one property of it that belongs unto its nature, and this always, wherever it is. And this is that which is expressed by the apostle, Rom. viii. 7, "The carnal mind is enmity against God." That which is here called φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός, "the wisdom of the flesh," is the same with "the law of sin" which we insist on. And what says he hereof? Why, it is ἔχθρα εἰς Θεόν,—"enmity against God." It is not only an enemy,—for so possibly some reconciliation of it unto God might be made,—but it is *enmity* itself, and so not capable of accepting any terms of peace. Enemies may be reconciled, but enmity cannot; yea, the only way to reconcile enemies is to destroy the enmity. So the apostle in another case tells us, Rom. v. 10, "We, who were enemies, are reconciled to God;" that is, a work compassed and brought about by the blood of Christ,—the reconciling of the greatest enemies. But when he comes to speak of enmity, there is no way for it, but

Digitized by Google

it must be abolished and destroyed: Eph. ii. 15, "Having abolished in his flesh the enmity." There is no way to deal with any enmity whatever but by its abolition or destruction.

And this also lies in it as it is enmity, that every part and parcel of it, if we may so speak, the least degree of it that can possibly remain in any one, whilst and where there is any thing of its nature, is enmity still. It may not be so effectual and powerful in operation as where it hath more life and vigour, but it is enmity still. As every drop of poison is poison, and will infect, and every spark of fire is fire, and will burn; so is every thing of the law of sin, the last, the least of it,—it is enmity, it will poison, it will burn. That which is any thing in the abstract is still so whilst it hath any being at all. Our apostle, who may well be supposed to have made as great a progress in the subduing of it as any one on the earth, yet after all cries out for deliverance, as from an irreconcilable enemy, Rom. vii. 24. The meanest acting, the meanest and most imperceptible working of it, is the acting and working of enmity. Mortification abates of its *force*, but doth not change its *nature*. Grace changeth the nature of man, but nothing can change the nature of sin. Whatever effect be wrought upon it, there is no effect wrought in it, but that it is enmity still, sin still. This then, by it, is our state and condition:—"God is love," 1 John iv. 8. He is so in himself, eternally excellent, and desirable above all. He is so to us, he is so in the blood of his Son and in all the inexpressible fruits of it, by which we are what we are, and wherein all our future hopes and expectations are wrapped up. Against this God we carry about us an enmity all our days; an enmity that hath this from its nature, that it is incapable of cure or reconciliation. Destroyed it may be, it shall be, but cured it cannot be. If a man hath an enemy to deal withal that is too mighty for him, as David had with Saul, he may take the course that he did,—consider what it is that provoked his enemy against him, and so address himself to remove the cause and make up his peace: 1 Sam. xxvi. 19, "If the LORD have stirred thee up against me, let him accept an offering: but if they be the children of men, cursed be they before the LORD." Come it from God or man, there is yet hope of peace. But when a man hath enmity itself to deal withal, nothing is to be expected but continual fighting, to the destruction of the one party. If it be not overcome and destroyed, it will overcome and destroy the soul.

And herein lies no small part of its power, which we are inquiring after,—it can admit of no terms of peace, of no composition. There may be a composition where there is no reconciliation,—there may be a *truce* where there is no *peace;* but with this enemy we can obtain neither the one nor the other. It is never quiet, conquering nor

Digitized by Google

conquered; which was the only kind of enemy that the famous warrior complained of of old. It is in vain for a man to have any expectation of rest from his lust but by its death; of absolute freedom but by his own. Some, in the tumultuating of their corruptions, seek for quietness by labouring to satisfy them, "making provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof," as the apostle speaks, Rom. xiii. 14. This is to aslake fire by wood and oil. As all the fuel in the world, all the fabric of the creation that is combustible, being cast into the fire, will not at all satisfy it, but increase it; so is it with satisfaction given to sin by sinning,—it doth but inflame and increase. If a man will part with some of his goods unto an enemy, it may satisfy him; but enmity will have all, and is not one whit the more satisfied than if he had received nothing at all,—like the lean cattle that were never the less hungry for having devoured the fat. You cannot bargain with the fire to take but so much of your houses; ye have no way but to quench it. It is in this case as it is in the contest between a wise man and a fool: Prov. xxix. 9, "Whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest." Whatever frame or temper he be in, his importunate folly makes him troublesome. It is so with this indwelling sin: whether it violently tumultuate, as it will do on provocations and temptations, it will be outrageous in the soul; or whether it seem to be pleased and contented, to be satisfied, all is one, there is no peace, no rest to be had with it or by it. Had it, then, been of any other nature, some other way might have been fixed on; but seeing it consists in enmity, all the relief the soul hath must lie in its ruin.

Secondly, It is not only said to be "enmity," but it is said to be "enmity against God." It hath chosen a great enemy indeed. It is in sundry places proposed as our enemy: 1 Pet. ii. 11, "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;" they are enemies to the soul, that is, to ourselves. Sometimes as an enemy to the Spirit that is in us: "The flesh lusteth" or fighteth "against the Spirit, Gal. v. 17. It fights against the Spirit, or the spiritual principle that is in us, to conquer it; it fights against our souls, to destroy them. It hath special ends and designs against our souls, and against the principle of grace that is in us; but its proper formal object is God: it is "enmity against God." It is its work to oppose grace; it is a consequent of its work to oppose our souls, which follows upon what it doth more than what it intends; but its nature and formal design is to oppose God,—God as the lawgiver, God as holy, God as the author of the gospel, a way of salvation by grace, and not by works,—this is the direct object of the law of sin. Why doth it oppose duty, so that the good we would do we do not, either as to matter or manner? Why doth it render the soul carnal, indisposed, unbelieving, unspiritual, weary, wandering? It is because of its enmity to God, whom

Digitized by Google

the soul aims to have communion withal in duty. It hath, as it were, that command from Satan which the Assyrians had from their king: "Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the king of Israel," 1 Kings xxii. 31. It is neither great nor small, but God himself, the King of Israel, that sin sets itself against. There lies the secret formal reason of all its opposition to good,—even because it relates unto God. May a road, a trade, a way of duties be set up, where communion with God is not aimed at, but only the duty itself, as is the manner of men in most of their superstitious worship, the opposition that will lie against it from the law of sin will be very weak, easy, and gentle. Or, as the Assyrians, because of his show of a king, assaulted Jehoshaphat, but when they found that it was not Ahab, they turned back from pursuing of him; so because there is a show and appearance of the worship of God, sin may make head against it at first, but when the duty cries out in the heart that indeed God is not there, sin turns away to seek out its proper enemy, even God himself, elsewhere. And hence do many poor creatures spend their days in dismal, tiring superstitions, without any great reluctancy from within, when others cannot be suffered freely to watch with Christ in a spiritual manner one hour. And it is no wonder that men fight with carnal weapons for their superstitious worship without, when they have no fighting against it within; for God is not in it, and the law of sin makes not opposition to any duty, but to God in every duty. This is our state and condition:—All the opposition that ariseth in us unto any thing that is spiritually good, whether it be from darkness in the mind, or aversation in the will, or sloth in the affections, all the secret arguings and reasonings that are in the soul in pursuit of them, the direct object of them is God himself. The enmity lies against *him;* which consideration surely should influence us to a perpetual, constant watchfulness over ourselves.

It is thus also in respect of all propensity unto sin, as well as aversation from God. It is God himself that is aimed at. It is true, the pleasures, the wages of sin, do greatly influence the sensual, carnal affections of men: but it is the holiness and authority of God that sin itself rises up against; it hates the yoke of the Lord. "Thou hast been weary of me," saith God to sinners; and that during their performance of abundance of duties. Every act of sin is a fruit of being weary of God. Thus Job tells us what lies at the bottom in the heart of sinners: "They say to God, Depart from us;"—it is enmity against him and aversation from him. Here lies the formal nature of every sin:—it is an opposition to God, a casting off his yoke, a breaking off the dependence which the creature ought to have on the Creator. And the apostle, Rom. viii. 7, gives the reason why

Digitized by Google

he affirms "the carnal mind to be enmity against God,"—namely, "because it is not subject to the will of God, nor indeed can be." It never is, nor will, nor can be subject to God, its whole nature consisting in an opposition to him. The soul wherein it is may be subject to the law of God; but this law of sin sets up in contrariety unto it, and will not be in subjection.

To manifest a little farther the power of this law of sin from this property of its nature, that it is enmity against God, one or two inseparable adjuncts of it may be considered, which will farther evince it:—

1. It is *universal.* Some contentions are bounded unto some particular concernments; this is about one thing, that about another. It is not so here; the enmity is absolute and universal, as are all enmities that are grounded in the nature of the things themselves. Such enmity is against the whole kind of that which is its object. Such is this enmity: for, (1.) It is universal to all of God; and, (2.) It is universal in all of the soul.

(1.) It is *universal to all of God.* If there were any thing of God, his nature, properties, his mind or will, his law or gospel, any duty of obedience to him, of communion with him, that sin had not an enmity against, the soul might have a constant shelter and retreat within itself, by applying itself to that of God, to that of duty towards him, to that of communion with him, that sin would make no opposition against. But the enmity lies against God, and all of God, and every thing wherein or whereby we have to do with him. It is not subject to the law, nor any part or parcel, word or tittle of the law. Whatever is opposite to any thing as such, is opposite unto all of it. Sin is enmity to God as God, and therefore to all of God. Not his goodness, not his holiness, not his mercy, not his grace, not his promises: there is not any thing of him which it doth not make head against; nor any duty, private, public, in the heart, in external works, which it opposeth not. And the nearer (if I may so say) any thing is to God, the greater is its enmity unto it. The more of spirituality and holiness is in any thing, the greater is its enmity. That which hath most of God hath most of its opposition. Concerning them in whom this law is most predominant, God says, "Ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof," Prov. i. 25. Not this or that part of God's counsel, his mind, or will is opposed, but all his counsel; whatever he calleth for or guideth unto, in every particular of it, all is set at nought, and nothing of his reproof attended unto. A man would think it not very strange that sin should maintain an enmity against God in his law, which comes to judge it, to condemn it; but it raiseth a greater enmity against him in his gospel, wherein he tenders mercy and

Digitized by Google

pardon as a deliverance from it; and that merely because more of the glorious properties of God's nature, more of his excellencies and condescension, is manifested therein than in the other.

(2.) It is *universal in all of the soul.* Would this law of sin have contented itself to have subdued any one faculty of the soul,—would it have left any one at liberty, any one affection free from its yoke and bondage,—it might possibly have been with more ease opposed or subdued. But when Christ comes with his spiritual power upon the soul, to conquer it to himself, he hath no quiet landing-place. He can set foot on no ground but what he must fight for and conquer. Not the mind, not an affection, not the will, but all is secured against him. And when grace hath made its entrance, yet sin will dwell in all its coasts. Were any thing in the soul at perfect freedom and liberty, there a stand might be made to drive it from all the rest of its holds; but it is universal, and wars in the whole soul. The mind hath its own darkness and vanity to wrestle with,—the will its own stubbornness, obstinacy, and perverseness; every affection its own frowardness and aversation from God, and its sensuality, to deal withal: so that one cannot yield relief unto another as they ought; they have, as it were, their hands full at home. Hence it is that our knowledge is imperfect, our obedience weak, love not unmixed, fear not pure, delight not free and noble. But I must not insist on these particulars, or I could abundantly show how diffused this principle of enmity against God is through the whole soul.

2. Hereunto might be added its *constancy.* It is constant unto itself, it wavers not, it hath no thoughts of yielding or giving over, notwithstanding the powerful opposition that is made unto it both by the law and gospel; as afterward shall be showed.

This, then, is a *third evidence* of the power of sin, taken from its nature and properties, wherein I have fixed but on one instance for its illustration,—namely, that it is "enmity against God," and that universal and constant. Should we enter upon a full description of it, it would require more space and time than we have allotted to this whole subject. What hath been delivered might give us a little sense of it, if it be the will of God, and stir us up unto watchfulness. What can be of a more sad consideration than that we should carry about us constantly that which is enmity against God, and that not in this or that particular, but in all that he is and in all wherein he hath revealed himself? I cannot say it is well with them who find it not. It is well with them, indeed, in whom it is weakened, and the power of it abated; but yet, for them who say it is not in them, they do but deceive themselves, and there is no truth in them.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V.

Nature of sin farther discovered as it is enmity against God—Its aversation from all good opened—Means to prevent the effects of it prescribed.

THIRDLY. WE have considered somewhat of the nature of indwelling sin, not *absolutely*, but in reference unto the discovery of its power; but this more clearly evidenceth itself in its *actings and operations*. Power is an act of life, and operation is the only discoverer of life. We know not that any thing lives but by the effects and works of life; and great and strong operations discover a powerful and vigorous life. Such are the operations of this law of sin, which are all demonstrations of its power.

That which we have declared concerning its nature is, that it consists in enmity. Now, there are two general heads of the working or operation of enmity,—first, *Aversation;* secondly, *Opposition*.

First, *Aversation*. Our Saviour, describing the enmity that was between himself and the teachers of the Jews, by the effects of it, saith in the prophet, "My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me," Zech. xi. 8. Where there is mutual enmity, there is mutual aversation, loathing, and abomination. So it was between the Jews and the Samaritans,—they were enemies, and abhorred one another; as John iv. 9.

Secondly, *Opposition*, or contending against one another, is the next product of enmity. Isa. lxiii. 10, "He was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them;" speaking of God towards the people. Where there is enmity, there will be fighting; it is the proper and natural product of it. Now, both these effects are found in this law of sin:—

First, For *aversation*. There is an aversation in it unto God and every thing of God, as we have in part discovered in handling the enmity itself, and so shall not need much to insist upon it again. All indisposition unto duty, wherein communion with God is to be obtained; all weariness of duty; all carnality, or formality unto duty,—it all springs from this root. The wise man cautions us against this evil: Eccles. v. 1, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God;"—"Hast thou any spiritual duty to perform, and dost thou design the attaining of any communion with God? look to thyself, take care of thy affections; they will be gadding and wandering, and that from their aversation to what thou hast in hand." There is not any good that we would do wherein we may not find this aversation exercising itself. "When I would do good, evil is present with me;"—"At any time, at all times, when I would do any thing that is spiritually good,

Digitized by Google

it is present,—that is, to hinder me, to obstruct me in my duty; because it abhors and loathes the thing which I have in hand, it will keep me off from it if it be possible." In them in whom it prevails, it comes at length unto that frame which is expressed, Ezek. xxxiii. 31. It will allow an outward, bodily presence unto the worship of God, wherein it is not concerned, but it keeps the heart quite away.

It may be some will pretend they find it not so in *themselves*, but they have *freedom* and *liberty* in and unto all the duties of obedience that they attend unto. But I fear this pretended liberty will be found, upon examination, to arise from one or both of these causes:—First, Ignorance of the true state and condition of their own souls, of their inward man and its actings towards God. They know not how it is with them, and therefore are not to be believed in what they report. They are in the dark, and neither know what they do nor whither they are going. It is like the Pharisee knew little of this matter; which made him boast of his duties to God himself. Or, secondly, It may be, whatever duties of worship or obedience such persons perform, they may, through want of faith and an interest in Christ, have no communion with them; and if so, sin will make but little opposition unto them therein. We speak of them whose hearts are exercised with these things. And if under their complaints of them, and groanings for deliverance from them, others cry out unto them, "Stand off, we are holier than ye," they are willing to bear their condition, as knowing that their way may be safe, though it be troublesome; and being willing to see their own dangers, that they may avoid the ruin which others fall into.

Let us, then, a little consider this aversation in such acts of obedience as wherein there is no concernment but that of God and the soul. In public duties there may be a mixture of other considerations; they may be so influenced by custom and necessity, that a right judgment cannot from them be made of this matter. But let us take into consideration the duties of retirement, as private prayer and meditation, and the like; or else extraordinary duties, or duties to be performed in an extraordinary manner:—

1. In these will this *aversation* and loathing oftentimes discover itself in the *affections*. A secret striving will be in them about close and cordial dealing with God, unless the hand of God in his Spirit be high and strong upon his soul. Even when convictions, sense of duty, dear and real esteem of God and communion with him, have carried the soul into its closet, yet if there be not the vigour and power of a spiritual life constantly at work, there will be a secret loathness in them unto duty; yea, sometimes there will be a violent inclination to the contrary, so that the soul had rather do any thing, embrace any diversion, though it wound itself thereby, than vigor-

Digitized by Google

ously apply itself unto that which in the inward man it breathes after. It is weary before it begins, and says, "When will the work be over?" Here God and the soul are immediately concerned; and it is a great conquest to do what we would, though we come exceedingly short of what we should do.

2. It discovers itself in the *mind* also. When we address ourselves to God in Christ, we are, as Job speaks, to "fill our mouths with arguments," chap. xxiii. 4, that we may be able to plead with him, as he calls upon us to do: Isa. xliii. 26, "Put me in remembrance; let us plead together." Whence the church is called upon to take unto itself words or arguments in going to God, Hos. xiv. 2. The sum is, that the mind should be furnished with the considerations that are prevailing with God, and be in readiness to plead them, and to manage them in the most spiritual manner, to the best advantage. Now, is there no difficulty to get the mind into such a frame as to lay out itself to the utmost in this work; to be clear, steady, and constant in its duty; to draw out and make use of its stores and furniture of promises and experiences? It starts, wanders, flags,—all from this secret aversation unto communion with God, which proceeds from the law of indwelling sin. Some complain that they can make no work of meditation,—they cannot bend their minds unto it. I confess there may be a great cause of this in their want of a right understanding of the duty itself, and of the ways of managing the soul in it; which therefore I shall a little speak to afterward: but yet this secret enmity hath its hand in the loss they are at also, and that both in their minds and in their affections. Others are forced to live in family and public duties, they find such little benefit and success in private. And here hath been the beginning of the apostasy of many professors, and the source of many foolish, sensual opinions. Finding this aversation in their minds and affections from closeness and constancy in private spiritual duties, not knowing how to conquer and prevail against these difficulties through Him who enables us, they have at first been subdued to a neglect of them, first partial, then total, until, having lost all conscience of them, they have had a door opened unto all sin and licentiousness, and so to a full and utter apostasy. I am persuaded there are very few that apostatize from a profession of any continuance, such as our days abound withal, but their door of entrance into the folly of backsliding was either some great and notorious sin that blooded their consciences, tainted their affections, and intercepted all delight of having any thing more to do with God; or else it was a course of neglect in private duties, arising from a weariness of contending against that powerful aversation which they found in themselves unto them. And this also, through the craft of Satan, hath been improved into many foolish

Digitized by Google

and sensual opinions of living unto God without and above any duties of communion. And we find, that after men have for a while choked and blinded their consciences with this pretence, cursed wickedness or sensuality hath been the end of their folly. And the reason of all this is, that the giving way to the law of sin in the least is the giving strength unto it. To let it alone, is to let it grow; not to conquer it, is to be conquered by it.

As it is in respect of *private*, so it is also in respect of *public* duties, that have any thing extraordinary in them. What strivings, strugglings, and pleadings are there in the heart about them, especially against the spirituality of them! Yea, in and under them, will not the mind and affections sometimes be entangled with things uncouth, new, and strange unto them, such as, at the time of the least serious business, a man would not deign to take into his thoughts? But if the least loose, liberty, or advantage be given unto indwelling sin, if it be not perpetually watched over, it will work to a strange and unexpected issue. In brief, let the soul unclothe any duty whatever, private or public, any thing that is called good,—let a man divest it of all outward respects which secretly insinuate themselves into the mind and give it some complacency in what it is about, but do not render it acceptable unto God,—and he shall assuredly find somewhat of the power and some of the effects of this aversation. It begins in loathness and indisposition; goes on with entangling the mind and affections with other things; and will end, if not prevented, in weariness of God, which he complains of in his people, Isa. xliii. 22. They ceased from duty because they were "weary of God."

But this instance being of great importance unto professors in their walking with God, we must not pass it over without some intimations of directions for them in their contending against it and opposition to it. Only this must be premised, that I am not giving directions for the mortifying of indwelling sin in general,—which is to be done alone by the Spirit of Christ, by virtue of our union with him, Rom. viii. 13,—but only of our particular duty with reference unto this especial evil or effect of indwelling sin that we have a little insisted on, or what in this single case the wisdom of faith seems to direct unto and call for; which will be our way and course in our process upon the consideration of other effects of it.

1. The great means to prevent the fruits and effects of this aversation is the constant keeping of the soul in a universally holy frame. As this weakens the whole law of sin, so answerably all its properties, and particularly this aversation. It is this frame only that will enable us to say with the Psalmist, Ps. lvii. 7, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed." It is utterly impossible to keep the heart in a prevailing holy frame in any one duty, unless it be so in and

Digitized by Google

unto all and every one. If sin-entanglements get hold in any one thing, they will put themselves upon the soul in every thing. A constant, even frame and temper in all duties, in all ways, is the only preservative for any one way. Let not him who is neglective in public persuade himself that all will be clear and easy in private, or on the contrary. There is a harmony in obedience; break but one part, and you interrupt the whole. Our wounds in particular arise generally from negligence as to the whole course; so David informs us, Ps. cxix. 6, "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all thy commandments." A universal respect to all God's commandments is the only preservative from shame; and nothing have we more reason to be ashamed of than the shameful miscarriages of our hearts in point of duty, which are from the principle before mentioned.

2. Labour to prevent the very *beginnings* of the workings of this aversation; let grace be beforehand with it in every duty. We are directed, 1 Pet. iv. 7, to "watch unto prayer;" and as it is unto prayer, so unto every duty,—that is, to consider and take care that we be not hindered from within nor from without as to a due performance of it. Watch against temptations, to oppose them; watch against the aversation that is in sin, to prevent it. As we are not to give place to Satan, no more are we to sin. If it be not prevented in its first attempts it will prevail. My meaning is: Whatever good, as the apostle speaks, we have to do, and find evil present with us (as we shall find it present), prevent its parleying with the soul, its insinuating of poison into the mind and affections, by a vigorous, holy, violent stirring up of the grace or graces that are to be acted and set at work peculiarly in that duty. Let Jacob come first into the world; or, if prevented by the violence of Esau, let him lay hold on his heel, to overthrow him and obtain the birthright. Upon the very first motion of Peter to our Saviour, crying, "Master, spare thyself," he immediately replies, "Get thee behind me, Satan." So ought we to say, "Get thee gone, thou law of sin, thou present evil;" and it may be of the same use unto us. Get grace, then, up betimes unto duty, and be early in the rebukes of sin.

3. Though it do its worst, yet be sure it never prevail to a *conquest*. Be sure you be not wearied out by its pertinacity, nor driven from your hold by its importunity; do not faint by its opposition. Take the apostle's advice, Heb. vi. 11, 12, "We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful." Still hold out in the same diligence. There are many ways whereby men are driven from a constant holy performance of duties, all of them dangerous, if not pernicious to the soul. Some are diverted by business, some by company,

Digitized by Google

some by the power of temptations, some discouraged by their own darkness; but none so dangerous as this, when the soul gives over in part or in whole, as wearied by the aversation of sin unto it, or to communion with God in it. This argues the soul's giving up of itself unto the power of sin; which, unless the Lord break the snare of Satan therein, will assuredly prove ruinous. Our Saviour's instruction is, that "we ought always to pray, and not to faint," Luke xviii. 1. Opposition will arise,—none so bitter and keen as that from our own hearts; if we faint, we perish. "Take heed lest ye be wearied," saith the apostle, "and faint in your minds," Heb. xii. 3. Such a fainting as is attended with a weariness, and that with a giving place to the aversation working in our hearts, is to be avoided, if we would not perish. The caution is the same with that of the same apostle, Rom. xii. 12, "Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer;" and in general with that of chap. vi. 12, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." To cease from duty, in part or in whole, upon the aversation of sin unto its spirituality, is to give sin the rule, and to obey it in the lusts thereof. Yield not, then, unto it, but hold out the conflict; wait on God, and ye shall prevail: Isa. xl. 31, "They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." But that which is now so difficult will increase in difficulty if we give way unto it; but if we abide in our station, we shall prevail. The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

4. Carry about a constant, *humbling sense* of this close aversation unto spiritualness that yet lies in our nature. If men find the efficacy of it, what should, what consideration can, be more powerful, to bring them unto humble walking with God? That after all the discoveries that God hath made of himself unto them, all the kindness they have received from him, his doing of them good and not evil in all things, there should yet be such a heart of unkindness and unbelief still abiding as to have an aversation lying in it to communion with him,—how ought the thoughts of it to cast us into the dust! to fill us with shame and self-abhorrency all our days! What have we found in God, in any of our approaches or addresses unto him, that it should be thus with us? What iniquity have we found in him? Hath he been a wilderness unto us, or a land of darkness? Did we ever lose any thing by drawing nigh unto him? nay, hath not therein lain all the rest and peace which we have obtained? Is not he the fountain and spring of all our mercies, of all our desirable things? Hath he not bid us welcome at our coming? Have we not received from him more than heart can conceive or tongue express?

Digitized by Google

What ails, then, our foolish and wretched hearts, to harbour such a cursed secret dislike of him and his ways? Let us be ashamed and astonished at the consideration of it, and walk in an humbling sense of it all our days. Let us carry it about with us in the most secret of our thoughts. And as this is a duty in itself acceptable unto God, who delights to dwell with them that are of an humble and contrite spirit, so it is of exceeding efficacy to the weakening of the evil we treat of.

5. Labour to possess the mind with the beauty and excellency of spiritual things, that so they may be presented *lovely* and *desirable* to the soul; and this cursed aversation of sin will be weakened thereby. It is an innate acknowledged principle, that the soul of man will not keep up cheerfully unto the worship of God unless it have a discovery of a beauty and comeliness in it. Hence, when men had lost all spiritual sense and savour of the things of God, to supply the want that was in their own souls, they invented outwardly pompous and gorgeous ways of worship, in images, paintings, pictures, and I know not what carnal ornaments; which they have called "The beauties of holiness!" Thus much, however, was discovered therein, that the mind of man must see a beauty, a desirableness in the things of God's worship, or it will not delight in it; aversation will prevail. Let, then, the soul labour to acquaint itself with the spiritual beauty of obedience, of communion with God, and of all duties of immediate approach to him, that it may be filled with delight in them. It is not my present work to discover the heads and springs of that beauty and desirableness which is in spiritual duties, in their relation to God, the eternal spring of all beauty,—to Christ, the love, desire, and hope of all nations,—to the Spirit, the great beautifier of souls, rendering them by his grace all glorious within; in their suitableness to the souls of men, as to their actings towards their last end, in the rectitude and holiness of the rule in attendance whereunto they are to be performed. But I only say at present, in general, that to acquaint the soul throughly with these things is an eminent way of weakening the aversation spoken of.

CHAPTER VI.

The work of this enmity against God by way of opposition—First, It lusteth—Wherein the lusting of sin consisteth—Its surprising of the soul—Readiness to close with temptations—Secondly, Its fighting and warring—1. In rebellion against the law of grace—2. In assaulting the soul.

How this enmity worketh by way of aversation hath been declared, as also the means that the soul is to use for the preventing of its

Digitized by Google

effects and prevalency. The second way whereby it exerts itself is *opposition*. Enmity will oppose and contend with that wherewith it is at enmity; it is so in things natural and moral. As light and darkness, heat and cold, so virtue and vice oppose each other. So is it with sin and grace; saith the apostle, "These are contrary one to the other," Gal. v. 17;—Ἀλλήλοις ἀντίκειται. They are placed and set in mutual opposition, and that continually and constantly, as we shall see.

Now, there are two ways whereby enemies manage an opposition, —first, by *force;* and, secondly, by *fraud* and deceit. So when the Egyptians became enemies to the children of Israel, and managed an enmity against them, Exod. i. 10, Pharaoh saith, "Let us deal wisely," or rather cunningly and subtilely, "with this people;" for so Stephen, with respect to this word, expresseth it, Acts vii. 19, by κατασοφισάμενος,—he used "all manner of fraudulent sophistry." And unto this deceit they added force in their grievous oppressions. This is the way and manner of things where there is a prevailing enmity; and both these are made use of by the law of sin in its enmity against God and our souls.

I shall begin with the first, or its actings, as it were, in a way of force, in an open downright opposition to God and his law, or the good that a believing soul would do in obedience unto God and his law. And in this whole matter we must be careful to steer our course aright, taking the Scripture for our guide, with spiritual reason and experience for our companions; for there are many shelves in our course which must diligently be avoided, that none who consider these things be troubled without cause, or comforted without a just foundation.

In this first way, whereby this sin exerts its enmity in opposition, —namely, as it were by force or strength,—there are four things, expressing so many distinct degrees in its progress and procedure in the pursuit of its enmity:—

First, Its general inclination: It "lusteth," Gal. v. 17.

Secondly, Its particular way of contending: It "fights or wars," Rom. vii. 23; James iv. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 11.

Thirdly, Its success in this contest: It "brings the soul into captivity to the law of sin," Rom. vii. 23.

Fourthly, Its growth and rage upon success: It comes up to "madness," as an enraged enemy will do, Eccles. ix. 3. All which we must speak to in order.

First, In general it is said to *lust:* Gal. v. 17, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit." This word expresseth the general nature of that opposition which the law of sin maketh against God and the rule of his Spirit or grace in them that believe; and, therefore, the

Digitized by Google

least degree of that opposition is expressed hereby. When it doth any thing, it lusteth; as, because burning is the general acting of fire, whatever it doth else, it doth also burn. When fire doth any thing it burns; and when the law of sin doth any thing it lusts.

Hence, all the actings of this law of sin are called "The lusts of the flesh:" Gal. v. 16, "Ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh;" Rom. xiii. 14, "Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." Nor are these lusts of the flesh those only whereby men act their sensuality in riot, drunkenness, uncleanness, and the like; but they comprehend all the actings of the law of sin whatever, in all the faculties and affections of the soul. Thus, Eph. ii. 3, we have mention of the desires, or wills, or "lusts of the mind," as well as of the "flesh." The mind, the most spiritual part of the soul, hath its lusts, no less than the sensual appetite, which seems sometimes more properly to be called the "flesh." And in the products of these lusts there are "defilements of the spirit" as well as of the "flesh," 2 Cor. vii. 1,—that is, of the mind and understanding, as well of the appetite and affections, and the body that attends their service. And in the blamelessness of all these consists our holiness: 1 Thess. v. 23, "The God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God, your whole spirit, and soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Yea, by the "flesh" in this matter the whole old man, or the law of sin, is intended: John iii. 6, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh,"—that is, it is all so, and nothing else; and whatever remains of the old nature in the new man is flesh still. And this flesh lusteth,—this law of sin doth so; which is the general bottom and foundation of all its opposition unto God. And this it doth two ways:—

1. In a hidden, close *propensity* unto all evil. This lies in it habitually. Whilst a man is in the state of nature, fully under the power and dominion of this law of sin, it is said that "every figment of his heart is evil, and that continually," Gen. vi 5. It can frame, fashion, produce, or act nothing but what is evil; because this habitual propensity unto evil that is in the law of sin is absolutely predominant in such a one. It is in the heart like poison that hath nothing to allay its venomous qualities, and so infects whatever it touches. And where the power and dominion of it is broken, yet in its own nature it hath still an habitual propensity unto that which is evil, wherein its lusting doth consist.

But here we must distinguish between the *habitual frame of the heart* and the *natural propensity or habitual inclination of the law of sin in the heart.* The habitual inclination of the heart is denominated from the principle that bears chief or sovereign rule in it; and therefore in believers it is unto good, unto God, unto holiness,

Digitized by Google

unto obedience. The heart is not habitually inclined unto evil by the remainders of indwelling sin; but this sin in the heart hath a constant, habitual propensity unto evil in itself or its own nature. This the apostle intends by its being present with us: "It is present with me;" that is, always and for its own end, which is to lust unto sin.

It is with indwelling sin as with a river. Whilst the springs and fountains of it are open, and waters are continually supplied unto its streams, set a dam before it, and it causeth it to rise and swell until it bear down all or overflow the banks about it. Let these waters be abated, dried up in some good measure in the springs of them, and the remainder may be coerced and restrained. But still, as long as there is any running water, it will constantly press upon what stands before it, according to its weight and strength, because it is its nature so to do; and if by any means it make a passage, it will proceed. So is it with indwelling sin; whilst the springs and fountains of it are open, in vain is it for men to set a dam before it by their convictions, resolutions, vows, and promises. They may check it for a while, but it will increase, rise high, and rage, at one time or another, until it bears down all those convictions and resolutions, or makes itself an under-ground passage by some secret lust, that shall give a full vent unto it. But now, suppose that the springs of it are much dried up by regenerating grace, the streams or actings of it abated by holiness, yet whilst any thing remains of it, it will be pressing constantly to have vent, to press forward into actual sin; and this is its lusting.

And this habitual propensity in it is discovered two ways:—

(1.) In its *unexpected surprisals* of the soul into foolish, sinful figments and imaginations, which it looked not for, nor was any occasion administered unto them. It is with indwelling sin as it is with the contrary principle of sanctifying grace. This gives the soul, if I may so say, many a blessed surprisal. It oftentimes ingenerates and brings forth a holy, spiritual frame in the heart and mind, when we have had no previous rational considerations to work them thereunto. And this manifests it to be an habitual principle prevailing in the mind: so Cant. vi. 12, "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me as the chariots of Ammi-nadib;" that is, free, willing, and ready for communion with Christ. לֹא יָדַעְתִּי;—"I knew not; it was done by the power of the Spirit of grace; so that I took no notice of it, as it were, until it was done." The frequent actings of grace in this manner, exciting acts of faith, love, and complacency in God, are evidences of much strength and prevalency of it in the soul. And thus, also, is it with indwelling sin; ere the soul is aware, without any provocation or temptation, when it knows not, it is cast into a vain and foolish frame. Sin produceth its figments secretly in the heart, and pre-

Digitized by Google

vents the mind's consideration of what it is about. I mean hereby those "actus primo primi," first acts of the soul; which are thus far involuntary, as that they have not the actual consent of the will unto them, but are voluntary as far as sin hath its residence in the will. And these surprisals, if the soul be not awake to take speedy care for the prevention of their tendency, do oftentimes set all as it were on fire, and engage the mind and affections into actual sin: for as by grace we are oftentimes, ere we are aware, "made as the chariots of a willing people," and are far engaged in heavenly-mindedness and communion with Christ, making speed in it as in a chariot; so by sin are we oftentimes, ere we are aware, carried into distempered affections, foolish imaginations, and pleasing delightfulness in things that are not good nor profitable. Hence is that caution of the apostle, Gal. vi. 1, Ἐὰν προλημφθῇ—"If a man be surprised at unawares with a fault, or in a transgression." I doubt not but the subtlety of Satan and the power of temptation are here taken into consideration by the apostle, which causeth him to express a man's falling into sin by ἐὰν προλημφθῇ,—"if he be surprised." So this working of indwelling sin also hath its consideration in it, and that in the chiefest place, without which nothing else could surprise us; for without the help thereof, whatever comes from without, from Satan or the world, must admit of some parley in the mind before it be received, but it is from within, from ourselves, that we are surprised. Hereby are we disappointed and wrought over to do that which we would not, and hindered from the doing of that which we would.

Hence it is, that when the soul is oftentimes doing as it were quite another thing, engaged quite upon another design, sin starts that in the heart or imaginations of it that carries it away into that which is evil and sinful. Yea, to manifest its power, sometimes, when the soul is seriously engaged in the mortification of any sin, it will, by one means or other, lead it away into a dalliance with that very sin whose ruin it is seeking, and whose mortification it is engaged in! But as there is in this operation of the law of sin a special enticing or entangling, we shall speak unto it fully afterward. Now, these surprisals can be from nothing but an habitual propensity unto evil in the principle from whence they proceed; not an habitual inclination unto actual sin in the mind or heart, but an habitual propensity unto evil in the sin that is in the mind or heart. This prevents the soul with its figments. How much communion with God is hereby prevented, how many meditations are disturbed, how much the minds and consciences of men have been defiled by this acting of sin, some may have observed. I know no greater burden in the life of a believer than these involuntary surprisals of soul; involuntary, I say, as to the actual consent of the will, but not so in respect of that cor-

Digitized by Google

ruption which is in the will, and is the principle of them. And it is in respect unto these that the apostle makes his complaint, Rom. vii. 24.

(2.) This *habitual inclination* manifests itself in its readiness and promptness, without dispute or altercation, to join and close with every temptation whereby it may possibly be excited. As we know it is in the nature of fire to burn, because it immediately lays hold on whatever is combustible, let any temptation whatever be proposed unto a man, the suitableness of whose matter unto his corruptions, or manner of its proposal, makes it a temptation; immediately he hath not only to do with the temptation as outwardly proposed, but also with his own heart about it. Without farther consideration or debate, the temptation hath got a friend in him. Not a moment's space is given between the proposal and the necessity there is incumbent on the soul to look to its enemy within. And this also argues a constant, habitual propensity unto evil. Our Saviour said of the assaults and temptations of Satan, "The prince of this world cometh, and he hath no part in me," John xiv. 30. He had more temptations, intensively and extensively, in number, quality, and fierceness, from Satan and the world, than ever had any of the sons of men; but yet in all of them he had to deal only with that which came from without. His holy heart had nothing like to them, suited to them, or ready to give them entertainment: "The prince of this world had nothing in him." So it was with Adam. When a temptation befell him, he had only the outward proposal to look unto; all was well within until the outward temptation took place and prevailed. With us it is not so. In a city that is at unity in itself, compact and entire, without divisions and parties, if an enemy approach about it, the rulers and inhabitants have no thoughts at all but only how they may oppose the enemy without, and resist him in his approaches. But if the city be *divided* in itself, if there be factions and traitors within, the very first thing they do is to look to the enemies at home, the traitors within, to cut off the head of Sheba, if they will be safe. All was well with Adam within doors when Satan came, so that he had nothing to do but to look to his assaults and approaches. But now, on the access of any temptation, the soul is instantly to look in, where it shall find this traitor at work, closing with the baits of Satan, and stealing away the heart; and this it doth always, which evinceth an habitual inclination. Ps. xxxviii. 17, saith David, "I am ready to halt," or for halting: כִּי־אֲנִי לְצֶלַע נָכוֹן;—"I am prepared and disposed unto hallucination, to the slipping of my foot into sin," verse 16, as he expounds the meaning of that phrase, Ps. lxxiii. 2, 3. There was from indwelling sin a continual disposition in him to be slipping, stumbling, halting, on every occasion or temptation. There is nothing so vain,

Digitized by Google

foolish, ridiculous, fond, nothing so vile and abominable, nothing so atheistical or execrable, but, if it be proposed unto the soul in a way of temptation, there is that in this law of sin which is ready to answer it before it be decried by grace. And this is the first thing in this lusting of the law of sin,—it consists in its habitual propensity unto evil, manifesting itself by the involuntary surprisals of the soul unto sin, and its readiness, without dispute or consideration, to join in all temptations whatever.

2. Its lusting consists in its *actual pressing* after that which is evil, and *actual opposition* unto that which is good. The former instance showed its constant readiness to this work; this now treats of the work itself. It is not only ready, but for the most part always engaged. "It lusteth," saith the Holy Ghost. It doth so continually. It stirreth in the soul by one act or other constantly, almost as the spirits in the blood, or the blood in the veins. This the apostle calls its tempting: James i. 14, "Every man is tempted of his own lust." Now, what is it to be tempted? It is to have that proposed to a man's consideration which, if he close withal, it is evil, it is sin unto him. This is sin's trade: Ἐπιθυμεῖ—"It lusteth." It is raising up in the heart, and proposing unto the mind and affections, that which is evil; trying, as it were, whether the soul will close with its suggestions, or how far it will carry them on, though it do not wholly prevail. Now, when such a temptation comes from without, it is unto the soul an indifferent thing, neither good nor evil, unless it be consented unto; but the very proposal from *within*, it being the soul's own act, is its sin. And this is the work of the law of sin,—it is restlessly and continually raising up and proposing innumerable various forms and appearances of evil, in this or that kind, indeed in every kind that the nature of man is capable to exercise corruption in. Something or other, in matter, or manner, or circumstance, inordinate, unspiritual, unanswerable unto the rule, it hatcheth and proposeth unto the soul. And this power of sin to beget figments and ideas of actual evil in the heart the apostle may have respect unto, 1 Thess. v. 22, Ἀπὸ παντὸς εἴδους πονηροῦ ἀπέχεσθε—"Keep yourselves from every figment or idea of sin in the heart;" for the word there used doth not anywhere signify an outward form or appearance: neither is it the appearance of evil, but an evil idea or figment that is intended. And this lusting of sin is that which the prophet expresseth in wicked men, in whom the law of it is predominant: Isa. lvii. 20, "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt;" a similitude most lively, expressing the lustings of the law of sin, restlessly and continually bubbling up in the heart, with wicked, foolish, and filthy imaginations and desires. This, then, is the first thing in the opposition that

Digitized by Google

this enmity makes to God,—namely, in its general inclination, it "lusteth."

Secondly, There is its particular way of contending,—it *fights* or *wars;* that is, it acts with strength and violence, as men do in war. First, it lusts, stirring and moving inordinate figments in the mind, desires in the appetite and the affections, proposing them to the will. But it rests not there, it cannot rest; it urgeth, presseth, and pursueth its proposals with earnestness, strength, and vigour, fighting, and contending, and warring to obtain its end and purpose. Would it merely stir up and propose things to the soul, and immediately acquiesce in the sentence and judgment of the mind, that the thing is evil, against God and his will, and not farther to be insisted on, much sin might be prevented that is now produced; but it rests not here,—it proceeds to carry on its design, and that with earnestness and contention. By this means wicked men "inflame themselves," Isa. lvii. 5. They are self-inflamers, as the word signifies, unto sin; every spark of sin is cherished in them until it grows into a flame: and so it will do in others, where it is so cherished.

Now, this fighting or warring of sin consists in two things:—1. In its *rebellion* against grace, or the law of the mind. 2. In its *assaulting* the soul, contending for rule and sovereignty over it.

1. The first is expressed by the apostle, Rom. vii. 23: "I find," says he, "another law," ἀντιστρατευόμενον τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ νοός μου, "rebelling against the law of my mind." There are, it seems, two laws in us,—the "law of the flesh," or of sin; and the "law of the mind," or of grace. But contrary laws cannot both obtain sovereign power over the same person, at the same time. The sovereign power in believers is in the hand of the law of grace; so the apostle declares, verse 22, "I delight in the law of God in the inward man." Obedience unto this law is performed with delight and complacency in the inward man, because its authority is lawful and good. So more expressly, chap. vi. 14, "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Now, to war against the law that hath a just sovereignty is to rebel; and so ἀντιστρατεύεσθαι signifies, it is to rebel, and ought to have been so translated, "Rebelling against the law of my mind." And this rebellion consists in a stubborn, obstinate opposition unto the commands and directions of the law of grace. Doth the "law of the mind" command any thing as duty? doth it severely rise up against any thing that is evil? When the lusting of the law of sin rises up to this degree, it contends against obedience with all its might; the effect whereof, as the apostle tells us, is "the doing of that which we would not, and the not doing of that which we would," chap. vii. 15, 16. And we may gather a notable instance of the power of sin in this its rebellion from this place. The law of grace prevails

Digitized by Google

upon the will, so that it would do that which is good: "To will is present with me," verse 18; "When I would do good," verse 21; and again, verse 19, "And I would not do evil." And it prevails upon the understanding, so that it approves or disapproves, according to the dictates of the law of grace: Verse 16, "I consent unto the law that it is good;" and verse 15. The judgment always lies on the side of grace. It prevails also on the affections: Verse 22, "I delight in the law of God in the inward man." Now, if this be so, that grace hath the sovereign power in the understanding, will, and affections, whence is it that it doth not always prevail, that we do not always do that which we would, and abstain from that which we would not? Is it not strange that a man should not do that which he chooseth, willeth, liketh, delighteth in? Is there any thing more required to enable us unto that which is good? The law of grace doth all, as much as can be expected from it, that which in itself is abundantly sufficient for the perfecting of all holiness in the fear of the Lord. But here lies the difficulty, in the entangling opposition that is made by the rebellion of this "law of sin." Neither is it expressible with what vigour and variety sin acts itself in this matter. Sometimes it proposeth diversions, sometimes it causeth weariness, sometimes it finds out difficulties, sometimes it stirs up contrary affections, sometimes it begets prejudices, and one way or other entangles the soul; so that it never suffers grace to have an absolute and complete success in any duty. Verse 18, Τὸ κατεργάζεσθαι τὸ καλὸν οὐχ εὑρίσκω·—"I find not the way perfectly to work out, or accomplish, that which is good," so the word signifies; and that from this opposition and resistance that is made by the law of sin. Now, this rebellion appears in two things:—(1.) In the opposition that it makes unto the *general purpose* and course of the soul. (2.) In the opposition it makes unto *particular duties.*

(1.) In the opposition it makes to the *general purpose* and course of the soul. There is none in whom is the Spirit of Christ, that is his, but it is his general design and purpose to walk in a universal conformity unto him in all things. Even from the inward frame of the heart to the whole compass of his outward actions, so it is with him. This God requires in his covenant: Gen. xvii. 1, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." Accordingly, his design is to walk before God; and his frame is sincerity and uprightness therein. This is called, "Cleaving unto the Lord with purpose of heart," Acts xi. 23,—that is, in all things; and that not with a slothful, dead, ineffectual purpose, but such as is operative, and sets the whole soul at work in pursuit of it. This the apostle sets forth, Phil. iii. 12–14, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am

Digitized by Google

apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." He useth three words excellently expressing the soul's universal pursuit of this purpose of heart in cleaving unto God: First, saith he, Διώκω, verse 12,—"I follow after," prosecute; the word signifies properly to persecute, which with what earnestness and diligence it is usually done we know. Secondly, Ἐπεκτείνομαι,—"I reach forward," reaching with great intension of spirit and affections. It is a great and constant endeavour that is expressed in that word. Thirdly, Κατὰ σκοπὸν διώκω,—say we, "I press towards the mark;" that is, even as men that are running for a prize. All set forth the vigour, earnestness, diligence, and constancy that is used in the pursuit of this purpose. And this the nature of the principle of grace requireth in them in whom it is. But yet we see with what failings, yea fallings, their pursuit of this course is attended. The frame of the heart is changed, the heart is stolen away, the affections entangled, eruptions of unbelief and distempered passions discovered, carnal wisdom, with all its attendancies, are set on work; all contrary to the general principle and purpose of the soul. And all this is from the rebellion of this law of sin, stirring up and provoking the heart unto disobedience. The prophet gives this character of hypocrites, Hos. x. 2, "Their heart is divided; therefore shall they be found faulty." Now, though this be wholly so in respect of the mind and judgment in hypocrites only, yet it is partially so in the best, in the sense described. They have a division, not of the heart, but in the heart; and thence it is that they are so often found faulty. So saith the apostle, "So that we cannot do the things that we would," Gal. v. 17. We cannot accomplish the design of close walking according to the law of grace, because of the contrariety and rebellion of this law of sin.

(2.) It rebels also in respect unto *particular duties*. It raiseth a combustion in the soul against the particular commands and designings of the law of grace. "You cannot do the things that you would;" that is, "The duties which you judge incumbent on you, which you approve and delight in in the inward man, you cannot do them as you would." Take an instance in prayer. A man addresseth himself unto that duty; he would not only perform it, but he would perform it in that manner that the nature of the duty and his own condition do require. He would "pray in the spirit," fervently, "with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered;" in faith, with love and delight, pouring forth his soul unto the Lord. This he aims at. Now, oftentimes he shall find a rebellion, a fighting of the

Digitized by Google

law of sin in this matter. He shall find difficulty to get any thing done who thought to do all things. I do not say that it is thus always, but it is so when sin "wars and rebels;" which expresseth an especial acting of its power. Woful entanglements do poor creatures oftentimes meet withal upon this account. Instead of that free, enlarged communion with God that they aim at, the best that their souls arrive unto is but to go away mourning for their folly, deadness, and indisposition. In a word, there is no command of the law of grace that is known, liked of, and approved by the soul, but when it comes to be observed, this law of sin one way or other makes head and rebels against it. And this is the first way of its fighting.

2. It doth not only rebel and resist, but it assaults the soul. It sets upon the law of the mind and grace; which is the second part of its warring: 1 Peter ii. 11, Στρατεύονται κατὰ τῆς ψυχῆς,—"They fight," or war, "against the soul;" James iv. 1, Στρατεύονται ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ὑμῶν,—"They fight," or war, "in your members." Peter shows what they oppose and fight against,—namely, the "soul" and the law of grace therein; James, what they fight with or by,—namely, the "members," or the corruption that is in our mortal bodies. Ἀντιστρατεύεσθαι is to rebel against a superior; στρατεύεσθαι is to assault or war for a superiority. It takes the part of an *assailant* as well as of a *resister*. It makes attempts for rule and sovereignty, as well as opposeth the rule of grace. Now, all war and fighting hath somewhat of violence in it; and there is therefore some violence in that acting of sin which the Scripture calls "fighting and warring." And this assailing efficacy of sin, as distinguished from its rebelling, before treated of, consists in these things that ensue:—

(1.) All its *positive actings* in stirring up unto sin belong to this head. Oftentimes, by the vanity of the mind, or the sensuality of the affections, the folly of the imaginations, it sets upon the soul then when the law of grace is not actually putting it on duty; so that therein it doth not rebel but assault. Hence the apostle cries out, Rom. vii. 24, "Who shall deliver me from it?" "Who shall rescue me out of its hand?" as the word signifies. When we pursue an enemy, and he resists us, we do not cry out, "Who shall deliver us?" for we are the assailants; but, "Who shall rescue me?" is the cry of one who is set upon by an enemy. So it is here; a man is assaulted by his "own lust," as James speaks. By the wayside, in his employment, under a duty, sin sets upon the soul with vain imaginations, foolish desires, and would willingly employ the soul to make provision for its satisfaction; which the apostle cautions us against, Rom. xiii. 14, Τῆς σαρκὸς πρόνοιαν μὴ ποιεῖσθε εἰς ἐπιθυμίας·—"Do not accomplish the providence or projection of the flesh for its own satisfaction."

(2.) Its *importunity* and urgency seems to be noted in this expres-

Digitized by Google

sion, of its warring. Enemies in war are restless, pressing, and importunate; so is the law of sin. Doth it set upon the soul?—Cast off its motions; it returns again. Rebuke them by the power of grace; they withdraw for a while, and return again. Set before them the cross of Christ; they do as those that came to take him,—at sight of him they went backwards and fell unto the ground, but they arose again and laid hands on him,—sin gives place for a season, but returns and presseth on the soul again. Mind it of the love of God in Christ; though it be stricken, yet it gives not over. Present hell-fire unto it; it rusheth into the midst of those flames. Reproach it with its folly and madness; it knows no shame, but presseth on still. Let the thoughts of the mind strive to fly from it; it follows as on the wings of the wind. And by this importunity it wearies and wears out the soul; and if the great remedy, Rom. viii. 3, come not timely, it prevails to a conquest. There is nothing more marvellous nor dreadful in the working of sin than this of its importunity. The soul knows not what to make of it; it dislikes, abhors, abominates the evil it tends unto; it despiseth the thoughts of it, hates them as hell; and yet is by itself imposed on with them, as if it were another person, an express enemy got within him. All this the apostle discovers, Rom. vii. 15–17: "The things that I do I hate." It is not of outward actions, but the inward risings of the mind that he treats. "I hate them," saith he; "I abominate them." But why, then, will he have any thing more to do with them? If he hate them, and abhor himself for them, let them alone, have no more to do with them, and so end the matter. Alas! saith he, verse 17, "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me;"—"I have one within me that is my enemy, that with endless, restless importunity puts these things upon me, even the things that I hate and abominate. I cannot be rid of them, I am weary of myself, I cannot fly from them. 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?'" I do not say that this is the ordinary condition of believers, but thus it is often when this law of sin riseth up to war and fighting. It is not thus with them in respect of particular sins,—this or that sin, outward sins, sins of life and conversation,—but yet in respect of vanity of mind, inward and spiritual distempers, it is often so. Some, I know, pretend to great perfection; but I am resolved to believe the apostle before them all and every one.

(3.) It carries on its war by *entangling of the affections*, and drawing them into a combination against the mind. Let grace be enthroned in the mind and judgment, yet if the law of sin lays hold upon and entangles the affections, or any of them, it hath gotten a fort from whence it continually assaults the soul. Hence the great duty of mortification is chiefly directed to take place upon the affec-

Digitized by Google

tions: Col. iii. 5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." The "members that are upon the earth" are our affections: for in the outward part of the body sin is not seated; in particular, not "covetousness," which is there enumerated, to be mortified amongst our members that are on the earth. Yea, after grace hath taken possession of the soul, the affections do become the principal seat of the remainders of sin;—and therefore Paul saith that this law is "in our members," Rom. vii. 23; and James, that it "wars in our members," chap. iv. 1,—that is, our affections. And there is no estimate to be taken of the work of mortification aright but by the affections. We may every day see persons of very eminent light, that yet visibly have unmortified hearts and conversations; their affections have not been crucified with Christ. Now, then, when this law of sin can possess any affection, whatever it be, love, delight, fear, it will make from it and by it fearful assaults upon the soul. For instance, hath it got the love of any one entangled with the world or the things of it, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life?—how will it take advantage on every occasion to break in upon the soul! It shall do nothing, attempt nothing, be in no place or company, perform no duty, private or public, but sin will have one blow or other at it; it will be one way or other soliciting for itself.

This is the sum of what we shall offer unto this acting of the law of sin, in a way of fighting and warring against our souls, which is so often mentioned in the Scripture; and a due consideration of it is of no small advantage unto us, especially to bring us unto self-abasement, to teach us to walk humbly and mournfully before God. There are two things that are suited to humble the souls of men, and they are, first, a due consideration of God, and then of themselves;—of God, in his greatness, glory, holiness, power, majesty, and authority; of ourselves, in our mean, abject, and sinful condition. Now, of all things in our condition, there is nothing so suited unto this end and purpose as that which lies before us; namely, the vile remainders of enmity against God which are yet in our hearts and natures. And it is no small evidence of a gracious soul when it is willing to search itself in this matter, and to be helped therein from a word of truth; when it is willing that the word should dive into the secret parts of the heart, and rip open whatever of evil and corruption lies therein. The prophet says of Ephraim, Hos. x. 11, "He loved to tread out the corn;" he loved to work when he might eat, to have always the corn before him: but God, says he, would "cause him to plough;" a labour no less needful, though at present not so delightful. Most men love to hear of the doctrine of grace, of the pardon of sin, of

Digitized by Google

free love, and suppose they find food therein; however, it is evident that they grow and thrive in the life and notion of them. But to be breaking up the fallow ground of their hearts, to be inquiring after the weeds and briers that grow in them, they delight not so much, though this be no less necessary than the other. This path is not so beaten as that of grace, nor so trod in, though it be the only way to come to a true knowledge of grace itself. It may be some, who are wise and grown in other truths, may yet be so little skilled in searching their own hearts, that they may be slow in the perception and understanding of these things. But this sloth and neglect is to be shaken off, if we have any regard unto our own souls. It is more than probable that many a false hypocrite, who have deceived themselves as well as others, because they thought the doctrine of the gospel pleased them, and therefore supposed they believed it, might be delivered from their soul-ruining deceits if they would diligently apply themselves unto this search of their own hearts. Or, would other professors walk with so much boldness and security as some do, if they considered aright what a deadly watchful enemy they continually carry about with them and in them? would they so much indulge as they do carnal joys and pleasures, or pursue their perishing affairs with so much delight and greediness as they do? It were to be wished that we would all apply our hearts more to this work, even to come to a true understanding of the nature, power, and subtlety of this our adversary, that our souls may be humbled; and that,—

1. In walking with God. His delight is with the humble and contrite ones, those that tremble at his word, the mourners in Zion; and such are we only when we have a due sense of our own vile condition. This will beget reverence of God, a sense of our distance from him, admiration of his grace and condescension, a due valuation of mercy, far above those light, verbal, airy *attainments*, that some have boasted of.

2. In walking with others. It lays in provision to prevent those great evils of judging, spiritual unmercifulness, harsh censuring, which I have observed to have been pretended by many, who, at the same time, as afterward hath appeared, have been guilty of greater or worse crimes than those which they have raved against in others. This, I say, will lead us to meekness, compassion, readiness to forgive, to pass by offences; even when we shall "consider" what is our state, as the apostle plainly declares, Gal. vi. 1. The man that understands the evil of his own heart, how vile it is, is the only useful, fruitful, and solid believing and obedient person. Others are fit only to delude themselves, to disquiet families, churches, and all relations whatever. Let us, then, consider our hearts wisely, and then go and see if we can be

Digitized by Google

proud of our gifts, our graces, our valuation and esteem amongst professors, our enjoyments. Let us go then and judge, condemn, reproach others that have been tempted; we shall find a great inconsistency in these things. And many things of the like nature might be here added upon the consideration of this woful effect of indwelling sin. The way of opposing and defeating its design herein shall be afterward considered.

CHAPTER VII.

The captivating power of indwelling sin, wherein it consisteth—The prevalency of sin, when from itself, when from temptation—The rage and madness that is in sin.

THE third thing assigned unto this law of sin in its opposition unto God and the law of his grace is, that *it leads the soul captive:* Rom. vii. 23, "I find a law leading me captive" (captivating me) "unto the law of sin." And this is the utmost height which the apostle in that place carries the opposition and warring of the remainders of indwelling sin unto; closing the consideration of it with a complaint of the state and condition of believers thereby, and an earnest prayer for deliverance from it: Verse 24, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" What is contained in this expression and intended by it shall be declared in the ensuing observations:—

1. It is not directly the *power* and actings of the law of sin that are here expressed, but its *success* in and upon its actings. But success is the greatest evidence of power, and leading captive in war is the height of success. None can aim at greater success than to lead their enemies captive; and it is a peculiar expression in the Scripture of great success. So the Lord Christ, on his victory over Satan, is said to "lead captivity captive," Eph. iv. 8,—that is, to conquer him who had conquered and prevailed upon others; and this he did when "by death he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil," Heb. ii. 14. Here, then, a great prevalency and power of sin in its warring against the soul is discovered. It so wars as to "lead captive;" which, had it not great power, it could not do, especially against that resistance of the soul which is included in this expression.

2. It is said that it leads the soul captive "unto the law of sin;"—not to this or that sin, particular sin, actual sin, but to the "law of sin." God, for the most part, ordereth things so, and gives out such

Digitized by Google

supplies of grace unto believers, as that they shall not be made a prey unto this or that particular sin, that it should prevail in them and compel them to serve it in the lusts thereof, that it should have dominion over them, that they should be captives and slaves unto it. This is that which David prays so earnestly against: Ps. xix. 12, 13, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright." He supposeth the continuance of the law of sin in him, verse 12, which will bring forth errors of life and secret sins; against which he findeth relief in pardoning and cleansing mercy, which he prays for. "This," saith he, "will be my condition. But for sins of pride and boldness, such as all sins are that get dominion in a man, that make a captive of a man, the Lord restrain thy servant from them." For what sin soever gets such power in a man, be it in its own nature small or great, it becomes in him in whom it is a sin of boldness, pride, and presumption; for these things are not reckoned from the nature or kind of the sin, but from its prevalency and customariness, wherein its pride, boldness, and contempt of God doth consist. To the same purpose, if I mistake not, prays Jabez: 1 Chron. iv. 10, "Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!" The holy man took occasion from his own name to pray against sin, that that might not be a grief and sorrow to him by its power and prevalency. I confess, sometimes it may come to this with a believer, that for a season he may be led captive by some particular sin; it may have so much prevalency in him as to have power over him. So it seems to have been with David, when he lay so long in his sin without repentance; and was plainly so with those in Isa. lvii. 17, 18, "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him." They continued under the power of their covetousness, so that no dealings of God with them, for so long a time, could reclaim them. But, for the most part, when any lust or sin doth so prevail, it is from the advantage and furtherance that it hath got by some powerful temptation of Satan. He hath poisoned it, inflamed it, and entangled the soul. So the apostle, speaking of such as through sin were fallen off from their holiness, says, "They were in the snare of the devil, being taken captive by him at his will," 2 Tim. ii. 26. Though it were their own lusts that they served, yet they were brought into bondage thereunto by being entangled in some snare of Satan; and thence they are said to be "taken alive," as a poor beast in a toil.

And here, by the way, we may a little inquire, whether the pre-

Digitized by Google

vailing power of a particular sin in any be from itself, or from the influence of temptation upon it; concerning which at present take only these two observations:—

(1.) Much of the *prevalency* of sin upon the soul is certainly from Satan, when the perplexing and captivating sin hath no peculiar footing nor advantage in the nature, constitution, or condition of the sinner. When any lust grows high and prevailing more than others, upon its own account, it is from the peculiar advantage that it hath in the natural constitution, or the station or condition of the person in the world; for otherwise the law of sin gives an equal propensity unto all evil, an equal vigour unto every lust. When, therefore, it cannot be discerned that the captivating sin is peculiarly fixed in the nature of the sinner, or is advantaged from his education or employment in the world, the prevalency of it is peculiarly from Satan. He hath got to the root of it, and hath given it poison and strength. Yea, perhaps, sometimes that which may seem to the soul to be the corrupt lusting of the heart, is nothing but Satan's imposing his suggestions on the imagination. If, then, a man find an importunate rage from any corruption that is not evidently seated in his nature, let him, as the Papists say, cross himself, or fly by faith to the cross of Christ, for the devil is nigh at hand.

(2.) When a lust is prevalent unto *captivity*, where it brings in no advantage to the flesh, it is from Satan. All that the law of sin doth of itself is to serve the providence of the flesh, Rom. xiii. 14; and it must bring in unto it somewhat of the profits and pleasures that are its object. Now, if the prevailing sin do not so act in itself, if it be more spiritual and inward, it is much from Satan by the imagination, more than the corruption of the heart itself. But this by the way.

I say, then, that the apostle treats not here of our being captivated unto this or that sin, but unto the law of sin; that is, we are compelled to bear its presence and burden whether we will or no. Sometimes the soul thinks or hopes that it may through grace be utterly freed from this troublesome inmate. Upon some sweet enjoyment of God, some full supply of grace, some return from wandering, some deep affliction, some thorough humiliation, the poor soul begins to hope that it shall now be freed from the law of sin; but after a while it perceives that it is quite otherwise. Sin acts again, makes good its old station; and the soul finds that, whether it will or no, it must bear its yoke. This makes it sigh and cry out for deliverance.

3. This leading captive argues a prevalency against the *renitency* or contrary actings of the will. This is intimated plainly in this expression,—namely, that the will opposeth and makes head, as it were, against the working of sin. This the apostle declares in those

Digitized by Google

expressions which he uses, chap. vii. 15, 19, 20. And herein consists the "lusting of the Spirit against the flesh," Gal. v. 17; that is, the contending of grace to expel and subdue it. The spiritual habits of grace that are in the will do so resist and act against it; and the excitation of those habits by the Spirit are directed to the same purpose. This leading captive is contrary, I say, to the inclinations and actings of the renewed will. No man is made a captive but against his will. Captivity is misery and trouble, and no man willingly puts himself into trouble. Men choose it in its causes, and in the ways and means leading unto it, but not in itself. So the prophet informs us, Hos. v. 11, "Ephraim was," not willingly, "oppressed and broken in judgment,"—that was his misery and trouble; but he "willingly walked after the commandment" of the idolatrous kings, which brought him thereunto. Whatever consent, then, the soul may give unto sin, which is the means of this captivity, it gives none to the captivity itself; that is against the will wholly. Hence these things ensue:—

(1.) That *the power of sin is great*,—which is that which we are in demonstration of; and this appears in its prevalency unto captivity against the actings and contendings of the will for liberty from it. Had it no opposition made unto it, or were its adversary weak, negligent, slothful, it were no great evidence of its power that it made captives; but its prevailing against diligence, activity, watchfulness, the constant renitency of the will, this evinceth its efficacy.

(2.) This leading captive intimates *manifold particular successes*. Had it not success in particular, it could not be said at all to lead captive. Rebel it might, assail it might; but it cannot be said to lead captive without some successes. And there are several degrees of the success of the law of sin in the soul. Sometimes it carries the person unto outward actual sin, which is its utmost aim; sometimes it obtaineth the consent of the will, but is cast out by grace, and proceeds no farther; sometimes it wearies and entangles the soul, that it turns aside, as it were, and leaves contending,—which is a success also. One or more, or all of these, must be, where captivity takes place. Such a kind of course doth the apostle ascribe unto covetousness, 1 Tim vi. 9, 10.

(3.) This leading captive manifests this condition to be *miserable and wretched*. To be thus yoked and dealt withal, against the judgment of the mind, the choice and consent of the will, its utmost strivings and contendings, how sad is it! When the neck is sore and tender with former pressures, to be compelled to bear the yoke again, this pierces, this grieves, this even breaks the heart. When the soul is principled by grace unto a loathing of sin, of every evil way, to a hatred of the least discrepancy between itself and the holy will of God, then to be imposed on by this law of sin, with all that

Digitized by Google

enmity and folly, that deadness and filth wherewith it is attended, what more dreadful condition? All captivity is dreadful in its own nature. The greatest aggravation of it is from the condition of the tyrant unto whom any one is captivated. Now, what can be worse than this law of sin? Hence the apostle, having once mentioned this captivity, cries out, as one quite weary and ready to faint, chap. vii. 24.

(4.) This condition is *peculiar to believers.* Unregenerate men are not said to be led captive to the law of sin. They may, indeed, be led captive unto this or that particular sin or corruption,—that is, they may be forced to serve it against the power of their convictions. They are convinced of the evil of it,—an adulterer of his uncleanness, a drunkard of his abomination,—and make some resolutions, it may be, against it; but their lust is too hard for them, they cannot cease to sin, and so are made captives or slaves to this or that particular sin. But they cannot be said to be led captive to the law of sin, and that because they are willingly subject thereunto. It hath, as it were, a rightful dominion over them, and they oppose it not, but only when it hath irruptions to the disturbance of their consciences; and then the opposition they make unto it is not from their wills, but is the mere acting of an affrighted conscience and a convinced mind. They regard not the nature of sin, but its guilt and consequences. But to be brought into captivity is that which befalls a man against his will; which is all that shall be spoken unto this degree of the actings of the power of sin, manifesting itself in its success.

The fourth and last degree of the opposition made by the law of sin to God and the law of his will and grace, is in its *rage and madness.* There is madness in its nature: Eccles. ix. 3, "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart." The evil that the heart of man is full of by nature is that indwelling sin whereof we speak; and this is so in their heart, that it riseth up unto madness. The Holy Ghost expresseth this rage of sin by a fit similitude, which he useth in sundry places: as Jer. ii. 24; Hos. viii. 9. It maketh men as "a wild ass;" "she traverseth her ways," and "snuffeth up the wind," and runneth whither her mind or lust leads her. And he saith of idolaters, enraged with their lusts, that they are "mad upon their idols," Jer. l. 38. We may a little consider what lies in this madness and rage of sin, and how it riseth up thereunto:—

1. For the *nature* of it; it seems to consist in a violent, heady, pertinacious pressing unto evil or sin. Violence, importunity, and pertinacy are in it. It is the tearing and torturing of the soul by any sin to force its consent and to obtain satisfaction. It riseth up in the heart, is denied by the law of grace, and rebuked;—it returns and exerts its poison again; the soul is startled, casts it off;—it returns again

Digitized by Google

with new violence and importunity; the soul cries out for help and deliverance, looks round about to all springs of gospel grace and relief, trembles at the furious assaults of sin, and casts itself into the arms of Christ for deliverance. And if it be not able to take that course, it is foiled and hurried up and down through the mire and filth of foolish imaginations, corrupt and noisome lusts, which rend and tear it, as if they would devour its whole spiritual life and power. See 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10; 2 Pet. ii. 14. It was not much otherwise with them whom we instanced in before, Isa. lvii. 17. They had an inflamed, enraged lust working in them, even "covetousness," or the love of this world; by which, as the apostle speaks, men "pierce themselves through with many sorrows." God is angry with them, and discovereth his wrath by all the ways and means that it was possible for them to be made sensible thereof. He was "wroth, and smote them;" but though, it may be, this staggered them a little, yet they "went on." He is angry, and "hides himself" from them,—deserts them as to his gracious, assisting, comforting presence. Doth this work the effect? No; they go on frowardly still, as men mad on their covetousness. Nothing can put a stop to their raging lusts. This is plain madness and fury. We need not seek far for instances. We see men mad on their lusts every day; and, which is the worst kind of madness, their lusts do not rage so much in them, as they rage in the pursuit of them. Are those greedy pursuits of things in the world, which we see some men engaged in, though they have other pretences, indeed any thing else but plain madness in the pursuit of their lusts? God, who searcheth the hearts of men, knows that the most of things that are done with other pretences in the world, are nothing but the actings of men mad and furious in the pursuit of their lusts.

2. That sin ariseth not unto this height ordinarily, but when it hath got a double advantage:—

(1.) That it be provoked, enraged, and heightened by some great *temptation*. Though it be a poison in itself, yet, being inbred in nature, it grows not violently outrageous without the contribution of some new poison of Satan unto it, in a suitable temptation. It was the advantage that Satan got against David, by a suitable temptation, that raised his lust to that rage and madness which it went forth unto in the business of Bath-sheba and Uriah. Though sin be always a fire in the bones, yet it flames not unless Satan come with his bellows to blow it up. And let any one in whom the law of sin ariseth to this height of rage seriously consider, and he may find out where the devil stands and puts in in the business.

(2.) It must be advantaged by some *former* entertainment and prevalency. Sin grows not to this height at its first assault. Had it not been suffered to make its entrance, had there not been some

Digitized by Google

yielding in the soul, this had not come about. The great wisdom and security of the soul in dealing with indwelling sin is to put a violent stop unto its beginnings, its first motions and actings. Venture all on the first attempt. Die rather than yield one step unto it. If, through the deceit of sin, or the negligence of the soul, or its carnal confidence to give bounds to lust's actings at other seasons, it makes any entrance into the soul, and finds any entertainment, it gets strength and power, and insensibly ariseth to the frame under consideration. Thou hadst never had the experience of the fury of sin, if thou hadst not been content with some of its dalliances. Hadst thou not brought up this servant, this slave, delicately, it would not have now presumed beyond a son. Now, when the law of sin in any particular hath got this double advantage,—the furtherance of a vigorous temptation, and some prevalency formerly obtained, whereby it is let into the strengths of the soul,—it often riseth up to this frame whereof we speak.

3. We may see what *accompanies* this rage and madness, what are the properties of it, and what effects it produceth:—

(1.) There is in it the casting off, for a time at least, of the yoke, rule, and government of the Spirit and law of grace. Where grace hath the dominion, it will never utterly be expelled from its throne, it will still keep its right and sovereignty; but its influences may for a season be intercepted, and its government be suspended, by the power of sin. Can we think that the law of grace had any actual influence of rule on the heart of David, when, upon the provocation received from Nabal, he was so hurried with the desire of self-revenge that he cried, "Gird on your swords," to his companions, and resolved not to leave alive one man of his whole household? 1 Sam. xxv. 34; or that Asa was in any better frame when he smote the prophet and put him in prison, that spake unto him in the name of the Lord? Sin in this case is like an untamed horse, which, having first cast off his rider, runs away with fierceness and rage. It first casts off a present sense of the yoke of Christ and the law of his grace, and then hurries the soul at its pleasure. Let us a little consider how this is done.

The seat and residence of grace is in the whole soul. It is in the inner man; it is in the mind, the will, and the affections: for the whole soul is renewed by it into the image of God, Eph. iv. 23, 24, and the whole man is a "new creature," 2 Cor. v. 17. And in all these doth it exert its power and efficacy. Its rule or dominion is the pursuit of its effectual working in all the faculties of the soul, as they are one united principle of moral and spiritual operations. So, then, the interrupting of its exercise, of its rule and power, by the law of sin, must consist in its contrary acting in and upon the faculties

Digitized by Google

and affections of the soul, whereon and by which grace should exert its power and efficacy. And this it doth. It darkens the mind; partly through innumerable vain prejudices and false reasonings, as we shall see when we come to consider its deceitfulness; and partly through the steaming of the affections, heated with the noisome lusts that have laid hold on them. Hence that saving light that is in the mind is clouded and stifled, that it cannot put forth its transforming power to change the soul into the likeness of Christ discovered unto it, which is its proper work, Rom. xii. 2. The habitual inclination of the will to obedience, which is the next way of the working of the law of grace, is first weakened, then cast aside and rendered useless, by the continual solicitations of sin and temptation; so that the will first lets go its hold, and disputes whether it shall yield or no, and at last gives up itself to its adversary. And for the affections, commonly the beginning of this evil is in them. They cross one another, and torture the soul with their impetuous violence. By this way is the rule of the law of grace intercepted by the law of sin, even by imposing upon it in the whole seat of its government. When this is done, it is sad work that sin will make in the soul. The apostle warns believers to take heed hereof, chap. vi. 12, "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." Look to it that it get not the dominion, that it usurp not rule, no, not for a moment. It will labour to intrude itself unto the throne; watch against it, or a woful state and condition lies at the door. This, then, accompanies this rage and madness of the law of sin:—It casts off, during its prevalency, the rule of the law of grace wholly; it speaks in the soul, but is not heard; it commands the contrary, but is not obeyed; it cries out, "Do not this abominable thing which the Lord hateth," but is not regarded,—that is, not so far as to be able to put a present stop to the rage of sin, and to recover its own rule, which God in his own time restores to it by the power of his Spirit dwelling in us.

(2.) *Madness* or rage is accompanied with *fearlessness* and contempt of danger. It takes away the power of consideration, and all that influence that it ought to have upon the soul. Hence sinners that are wholly under the power of this rage are said to "run upon God, and the thick bosses of his buckler," Job xv. 26;—that wherein he is armed for their utter ruin. They despise the utmost that he can do to them, being secretly resolved to accomplish their lusts, though it cost them their souls. Some few considerations will farther clear this unto us:—

[1.] Ofttimes, when the soul is broken loose from the power of *renewing* grace, God deals with it, to keep it within bounds, by *preventing* grace. So the Lord declares that he will deal with Israel,

Digitized by Google

Hos. ii. 6;—"Seeing thou hast rejected me, I will take another course with thee. I will lay obstacles before thee that thou shalt not be able to pass on whither the fury of thy lusts would drive thee." He will propose that to them from without that shall obstruct them in their progress.

[2.] These hinderances that God lays in the way of sinners, as shall be afterward at large declared, are of two sorts:—

1*st. Rational considerations*, taken from the consequence of the sin and evil that the soul is solicited unto and perplexed withal. Such are the fear of death, judgment, and hell,—falling into the hands of the living God, who is a consuming fire. Whilst a man is under the power of the law of the Spirit of life, the "love of Christ constraineth him," 2 Cor. v. 14. The principle of his doing good and abstaining from evil is faith working by love, accompanied with a following of Christ because of the sweet savour of his name. But now, when this blessed, easy yoke is for a season cast off, so as was manifested before, God sets a hedge of terror before the soul, minds it of death and judgment to come, flashes the flames of hell-fire in the face, fills the soul with consideration of all the evil consequence of sin, to deter it from its purpose. To this end doth he make use of all threatenings recorded in the law and gospel. To this head also may be referred all the considerations that may be taken from things temporal, as shame, reproach, scandal, punishments, and the like. By the consideration of these things, I say, doth God set a hedge before them.

2*dly. Providential dispensations* are used by the Lord to the same purpose, and these are of two sorts:—

(1*st.*) Such as are suited to work upon the soul, and to cause it to desist and give over in its lustings and pursuit of sin. Such are afflictions and mercies: Isa. lvii. 17, "I was wroth, and I smote them;" —"I testified my dislike of their ways by afflictions." So Hos. ii. 9, 11, 12. God chastens men with pains on their bodies; saith he in Job, "To turn them from their purpose, and to hide sin from them," chap. xxxiii. 17–19. And other ways he hath to come to them and touch them, as in their names, relations, estates, and desirable things; or else he heaps mercies on them, that they may consider whom they are rebelling against. It may be signal distinguishing mercies are made their portion for many days.

(2*dly.*) Such as *actually hinder* the soul from pursuing sin, though it be resolved so to do. The various ways whereby God doth this we must afterward consider.

These are the ways, I say, whereby the soul is dealt withal, after the law of indwelling sin hath cast off for a season the influencing power of the law of grace. But now, when lust rises up to rage or madness, it will also contemn all these, even the rod, and Him that

Digitized by Google

hath appointed it. It will rush on shame, reproaches, wrath, and whatever may befall it; that is, though they be presented unto it, it will venture upon them all. Rage and madness is fearless. And this it doth two ways:—

[1*st.*] It *possesseth the mind*, that it suffers not the consideration of these things to dwell upon it, but renders the thoughts of them slight and evanid; or if the mind do force itself to a contemplation of them, yet it interposeth between it and the affections, that they shall not be influenced by it in any proportion to what is required. The soul in such a condition will be able to take such things into contemplation, and not at all to be moved by them; and where they do prevail for a season, yet they are insensibly wrought off from the heart again.

[2*dly.*] By secret *stubborn resolves* to venture all upon the way wherein it is.

And this is the second branch of this evidence of the power of sin, taken from the opposition that it makes to the law of grace, as it were by the way of force, strength, and violence. The consideration of its deceit doth now follow.

CHAPTER VIII.

Indwelling sin proved powerful from its deceit—Proved to be deceitful—The general nature of deceit—James i. 14, opened—How the mind is drawn off from its duty by the deceitfulness of sin—The principal duties of the mind in our obedience—The ways and means whereby it is turned from it.

THE second part of the evidence of the power of sin, from its manner of operation, is taken from its *deceitfulness*. It adds, in its working, *deceit* unto *power*. The efficacy of that must needs be great, and is carefully to be watched against by all such as value their souls, where power and deceit are combined, especially advantaged and assisted by all the ways and means before insisted on.

Before we come to show wherein the nature of this deceitfulness of sin doth consist, and how it prevaileth thereby, some testimonies shall be briefly given in unto the *thing itself*, and some light into the *general nature* of it.

That sin, indwelling sin, is deceitful, we have the express testimony of the Holy Ghost, as Heb. iii. 13, "Take heed that ye be not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Deceitful it is; take heed of it, watch against it, or it will produce its utmost effect in hardening of the heart against God. It is on the account of sin that the heart

Digitized by Google

is said to be "deceitful above all things," Jer. xvii. 9. Take a man in other things, and, as Job speaks, though he "would be wise and crafty, he is like the wild ass's colt," chap. xi. 12,—a poor, vain, empty nothing; but consider his heart on the account of this law of sin,—it is crafty and deceitful above all things. "They are wise to do evil," saith the prophet, "but to do good they have no knowledge," Jer. iv. 22. To the same purpose speaks the apostle, Eph. iv. 22, "The old man is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." Every lust, which is a branch of this law of sin, is deceitful; and where there is poison in every stream, the fountain must needs be corrupt. No particular lust hath any deceit in it, but what is communicated unto it from this fountain of all actual lust, this law of sin. And, 2 Thess. ii. 10, the coming of the "man of sin" is said to be in and with the "deceivableness of unrighteousness." Unrighteousness is a thing generally decried and evil spoken of amongst men, so that it is not easy to conceive how any man should prevail himself of a reputation thereby. But there is a deceivableness in it, whereby the minds of men are turned aside from a due consideration of it; as we shall manifest afterward. And thus the account which the apostle gives concerning those who are under the power of sin is, that they are "deceived," Tit. iii. 3. And the life of evil men is nothing but "deceiving, and being deceived," 2 Tim. iii. 13. So that we have sufficient testimony given unto this qualification of the enemy with whom we have to deal. He is deceitful; which consideration of all things puts the mind of man to a loss in dealing with an adversary. He knows he can have no security against one that is deceitful, but in standing upon his own guard and defence all his days.

Farther to manifest the strength and advantage that sin hath by its deceit, we may observe that the Scripture places it for the most part as the head and spring of every sin, even as though there were no sin followed after but where deceit went before. So 1 Tim. ii. 13, 14. The reason the apostle gives why Adam, though he was *first formed*, was not *first in the transgression*, is because he was not *first deceived*. The woman, though made last, yet being first deceived, was first in the sin. Even that first sin began in deceit, and until the mind was deceived the soul was safe. Eve, therefore, did truly express the matter, Gen. iii. 13, though she did it not to a good end. "The serpent beguiled me," saith she, "and I did eat." She thought to extenuate her own crime by charging the serpent; and this was a new fruit of the sin she had cast herself into. But the matter of fact was true,—she was beguiled before she ate; deceit went before the transgression. And the apostle shows that sin and Satan still take the same course, 2 Cor. xi. 3. "There is," saith he, "the same way of working towards actual sin as was of old: beguiling, deceiving goes

Digitized by Google

before; and sin, that is, the actual accomplishment of it, followeth after." Hence, all the great works that the devil doth in the world, to stir men up to an opposition unto the Lord Jesus Christ and his kingdom, he doth them by deceit: Rev. xii. 9, "The devil, who deceiveth the whole world." It were utterly impossible men should be prevailed on to abide in his service, acting his designs to their eternal, and sometimes their temporal ruin, were they not exceedingly deceived. See also chap. xx. 10.

Hence are those manifold cautions that are given us to take heed that we be not deceived, if we would take heed that we do not sin. See Eph. v. 6; 1 Cor. vi. 9, xv. 33; Gal. vi. 7; Luke xxi. 8. From all which testimonies we may learn the influence that deceit hath into sin, and consequently the advantage that the law of sin hath to put forth its power by its deceitfulness. Where it prevails to deceive, it fails not to bring forth its fruit.

The ground of this efficacy of sin by deceit is taken from the faculty of the soul affected with it. Deceit properly affects the *mind;* it is the mind that is deceived. When sin attempts any other way of entrance into the soul, as by the affections, the mind, retaining its right and sovereignty, is able to give check and control unto it. But where the mind is tainted, the prevalency must be great; for the mind or understanding is the leading faculty of the soul, and what that fixes on, the will and affections rush after, being capable of no consideration but what that presents unto them. Hence it is, that though the entanglement of the affections unto sin be ofttimes most troublesome, yet the deceit of the mind is always most dangerous, and that because of the place that it possesseth in the soul as unto all its operations. Its office is to guide, direct, choose, and lead; and "if the light that is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

And this will farther appear if we consider the nature of deceit in general. It consists in presenting unto the soul, or mind, things otherwise than they are, either in their nature, causes, effects, or present respect unto the soul. This is the general nature of deceit, and it prevails many ways. It *hides* what ought to be seen and considered, conceals circumstances and consequences, presents what is not, or things as they are not, as we shall afterward manifest in particular. It was showed before that Satan "beguiled" and "deceived" our first parents; that term the Holy Ghost gives unto his temptation and seduction. And how he did deceive them the Scripture relates, Gen. iii. 4, 5. He did it by representing things otherwise than they were. The fruit was *desirable;* that was apparent unto the eye. Hence Satan takes advantage secretly to insinuate that it was merely an abridgment of their happiness that God aimed at in forbidding them to eat of it. That it was for the trial of their obedience, that

Digitized by Google

certain though not immediate ruin would ensue upon the eating of it, he hides from them; only he proposeth the present advantage of knowledge, and so presents the whole case quite otherwise unto them than indeed it was. This is the nature of deceit; it is a representation of a matter under disguise, hiding that which is undesirable, proposing that which indeed is not in it, that the mind may make a false judgment of it: so Jacob deceived Isaac by his brother's raiment and the skins on his hands and neck.

Again; deceit hath advantage by that way of management which is inseparable from it. It is always carried on by *degrees*, by little and little, that the whole of the design and aim in hand be not at once discovered. So dealt Satan in that great deceit before mentioned; he proceeds in it by steps and degrees. First, he takes off an objection, and tells them they *shall not die;* then proposeth *the good of knowledge* to them, and their being *like to God* thereby. To hide and conceal ends, to proceed by steps and degrees, to make use of what is obtained, and thence to press on to farther effects, is the true nature of deceit. Stephen tells us that the king of Egypt "dealt subtilly," or deceitfully, "with their kindred," Acts vii. 19. How he did it we may see, Exod. i. He did not at first fall to killing and slaying of them, but says, verse 10, "Come, let us deal wisely," beginning to oppress them. This brings forth their bondage, verse 11. Having got this ground to make them slaves, he proceeds to destroy their children, verse 16. He fell not on them all at once, but by degrees. And this may suffice to show in general that sin is deceitful, and the advantages that it hath thereby.

For the way, and manner, and progress of sin in working by deceit, we have it fully expressed, James i. 14, 15, "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." This place, declaring the whole of what we aim at in this matter, must be particularly insisted on.

In the foregoing verse the apostle manifests that men are willing to drive the old trade, which our first parents at the entrance of sin set up withal, namely, of excusing themselves in their sins, and casting the occasion and blame of them on others. It is not, say they, from themselves, their own nature and inclinations, their own designings, that they have committed such and such evils, but merely from their temptations; and if they know not where to fix the evil of those temptations, they will lay them on God himself, rather than go without an excuse or extenuation of their guilt. This evil in the hearts of men the apostle rebuketh, verse 13, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man." And to show the justness of

Digitized by Google

this reproof, in the words mentioned he discovers the true causes of the rise and whole progress of sin, manifesting that the whole guilt of it lies upon the sinner, and that the whole punishment of it, if not graciously prevented, will be his lot also.

We have, therefore, as was said, in these words the whole progress of lust or indwelling sin, by the way of subtlety, fraud, and deceit, expressed and limited by the Holy Ghost. And from hence we shall manifest the particular ways and means whereby it puts forth its power and efficacy in the hearts of men by deceitfulness and subtlety; and we may observe in the words,—

First, The utmost end aimed at in all the actings of sin, or the tendency of it in its own nature, and that is *death:* "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death,"—the everlasting death of the sinner; pretend what it will, this is the end it aims at and tends unto. Hiding of ends and designs is the principal property of deceit. This sin doth to the uttermost; other things innumerable it pleads, but not once declares that it aims at the death, the everlasting death of the soul. And a fixed apprehension of this end of every sin is a blessed means to prevent its prevalency in its way of deceit or beguiling.

Secondly, The general way of its acting towards that end is by *temptation:* "Every man is tempted of his own lust." I purpose not to speak in general of the nature of temptations, it belongs not unto our present purpose; and, besides, I have done it elsewhere.[1] It may suffice at present to observe, that the life of temptation lies in deceit; so that, in the business of sin, to be effectually tempted, and to be beguiled or deceived, are the same. Thus it was in the first temptation. It is everywhere called the serpent's beguiling or deceiving, as was manifested before: "The serpent beguiled Eve;" that is, prevailed by his temptations upon her. So that every man is tempted,—that is, every man is beguiled or deceived,—by his own lust, or indwelling sin, which we have often declared to be the same.

The degrees whereby sin proceedeth in this work of tempting or deceiving are five; for we showed before that this belongs unto the nature of deceit, that it works by degrees, making its advantage by one step to gain another.

The first of these consists in drawing off or drawing away: "Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust."

The second is in enticing: "And is enticed."

The third in the conception of sin: "When lust hath conceived." When the heart is enticed, then lust conceives in it.

The fourth is the bringing forth of sin in its actual accomplishment: "When lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin." In all which there is a secret allusion to an adulterous deviation from conjugal

[1] See the previous treatise on Temptation.

Digitized by Google

duties, and conceiving or bringing forth children of whoredom and fornication.

The fifth is *the finishing of sin*, the completing of it, the filling up of the measure of it, whereby the end originally designed by lust is brought about: "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." As lust conceiving naturally and necessarily bringeth forth sin, so sin finished infallibly procureth eternal death.

The first of these relates to the *mind;* that is drawn off or drawn away by the deceit of sin. The second unto the *affections;* they are enticed or entangled. The third to the *will*, wherein sin is conceived; the consent of the will being the formal conception of actual sin. The fourth to the *conversation* wherein sin is brought forth; it exerts itself in the lives and courses of men. The fifth respects *an obdurate course* in sinning, that finisheth, consummates, and shuts up the whole work of sin, whereon ensues death or eternal ruin.

I shall principally consider the three first, wherein the main strength of the deceit of sin doth lie; and that because in believers, whose state and condition is principally proposed to consideration, God is pleased, for the most part, graciously to prevent the fourth instance, or the bringing forth of actual sins in their conversations; and the last always and wholly, or their being obdurate in a course of sin to the finishing of it. What ways God in his grace and faithfulness makes use of to stifle the conceptions of sin in the womb, and to hinder its actual production in the lives of men, must afterward be spoken unto. The first three instances, then, we shall insist upon fully, as those wherein the principal concernment of believers in this matter doth lie.

The first thing which sin is said to do, working in a way of deceit, is to draw away or to draw off; whence a man is said to be drawn off, or "drawn away" and diverted,—namely, from attending unto that course of obedience and holiness which, in opposition unto sin and the law thereof, he is bound with diligence to attend unto.

Now, it is the mind that this effect of the deceit of sin is wrought upon. The mind or understanding, as we have showed, is the guiding, conducting faculty of the soul. It goes before in discerning, judging, and determining, to make the way of moral actions fair and smooth to the will and affections. It is to the soul what Moses told his father-in-law that he might be to the people in the wilderness, as "eyes to guide them," and keep them from wandering in that desolate place. It is the eye of the soul, without whose guidance the will and affections would perpetually wander in the wilderness of this world, according as any object, with an appearing present good, did offer or present itself unto them.

The first thing, therefore, that sin aims at in its deceitful work-

Digitized by Google

ing, is to draw off and divert the mind from the discharge of its duty.

There are two things which belong unto the duty of the mind in that special office which it hath in and about the obedience which God requireth:—

1. To keep itself and the whole soul in such a frame and posture as may render it ready unto all duties of obedience, and watchful against all enticements unto the conception of sin.

2. In particular, carefully to attend unto all particular actions, that they be performed *as* God requireth, for matter, manner, time and season, agreeably unto his will; as also for the obviating all particular *tenders* of sin in things forbidden. In these two things consists the whole duty of the mind of a believer; and from both of them doth indwelling sin endeavour to divert it and draw it off.

1. The first of these is the duty of the mind in reference unto the general frame and course of the whole soul; and hereof two things may be considered. That it is founded in a due, constant consideration,—(1.) Of ourselves, of sin and its vileness; (2.) Of God, of his grace and goodness: and both these doth sin labour to draw it off from. 2. In attending to those *duties* which are suited to obviate the working of the law of sin in an especial manner.

1. (1.) It endeavours to draw it off from a due consideration, apprehension, and sensibleness of its own *vileness*, and the danger wherewith it is attended. This, in the first place, we shall instance in. A due, constant consideration of sin, in its nature, in all its aggravating circumstances, in its end and tendency, especially as represented in the blood and cross of Christ, ought always to abide with us: Jer. ii. 19, "Know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and a bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God." Every sin is a forsaking of the Lord our God. If the heart know not, if it consider not, that it is an evil thing and a bitter,—evil in itself, bitter in its effects, fruit, and event,—it will never be secured against it. Besides, that frame of heart which is most accepted with God in any sinner is the humble, contrite, self-abasing frame: Isa. lvii. 15, "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the spirit of the contrite ones." See also Luke xviii. 13, 14. This becomes a sinner; no garment sits so decently about him. "Be clothed with humility," saith the apostle, 1 Pet. v. 5. It is that which becomes us, and it is the only safe frame. He that walketh humbly walketh safely. This is the design of Peter's advice, 1 Epist. i. 17, "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." After that he himself had miscarried by another frame of mind, he gives this advice

Digitized by Google

to all believers. It is not a bondage, servile fear, disquieting and perplexing the soul, but such a fear as may keep men constantly calling upon the Father, with reference unto the final judgment, that they may be preserved from sin, whereof they were in so great danger, which he advises them unto: "If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." This is the humble frame of soul. And how is this obtained? how is this preserved? No otherwise but by a constant, deep apprehension of the evil, vileness, and danger of sin. So was it wrought, so was it kept up, in the approved publican. "God be merciful," saith he, "to me a sinner." Sense of sin kept him humble, and humility made way for his access unto a testimony of the pardon of sin.

And this is the great *preservative* through grace from sin, as we have an example in the instance of Joseph, Gen. xxxix. 9. Upon the urgency of his great temptation, he recoils immediately into this frame of spirit. "How," saith he, "can I do this thing, and sin against God?" A constant, steady sense of the evil of sin gives him such preservation, that he ventures liberty and life in opposition to it. To fear sin is to fear the Lord; so the holy man tells us that they are the same: Job xxviii. 28, "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding."

This, therefore, in the first place, in general, doth the law of sin put forth its deceit about,—namely, to draw the mind from this frame, which is the strongest fort of the soul's defence and security. It labours to divert the mind from a due apprehension of the vileness, abomination, and danger of sin. It secretly and insensibly insinuates lessening, excusing, extenuating thoughts of it; or it draws it off from pondering upon it, from being conversant about it in its thoughts so much as it ought, and formerly hath been. And if, after the heart of a man hath, through the word, Spirit, and grace of Christ, been made tender, soft, deeply sensible of sin, it becomes on any account, or by any means whatever, to have less, fewer, slighter, or less affecting thoughts of it or about it, the mind of that man is drawn away by the deceitfulness of sin.

There are two ways, amongst others, whereby the law of sin endeavours deceitfully to draw off the mind from this duty and frame ensuing thereon:—

[1.] It doth it by a horrible *abuse of gospel grace*. There is in the gospel a remedy provided against the whole evil of sin, the filth, the guilt of it, with all its dangerous consequents. It is the doctrine of the deliverance of the souls of men from sin and death,—a discovery of the gracious will of God towards sinners by Jesus Christ. What, now, is the genuine tendency of this doctrine, of this discovery

Digitized by Google

of grace; and what ought we to use it and improve it unto? This the apostle declares, Tit. ii. 11, 12, "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." This it teacheth; this we ought to learn of it and by it. Hence universal holiness is called a "conversation that becometh the gospel," Phil. i. 27. It becomes it, as that which is answerable unto its end, aim, and design,—as that which it requires, and which it ought to be improved unto. And accordingly it doth produce this effect where the word of it is received and preserved in a saving light, Rom. xii. 2; Eph. iv. 20–24. But herein doth the deceit of sin interpose itself:—It separates between the doctrine of grace and the use and end of it. It stays upon its notions, and intercepts its influences in its proper application. From the doctrine of the assured pardon of sin, it insinuates a regardlessness of sin. God in Christ makes the proposition, and Satan and sin make the conclusion. For that the deceitfulness of sin is apt to plead unto a regardlessness of it, from the grace of God whereby it is pardoned, the apostle declares in his reproof and detestation of such an insinuation: Rom. vi. 1, "What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid." "Men's deceitful hearts," saith he, "are apt to make that conclusion; but far be it from us that we should give any entertainment unto it." But yet that some have evidently improved that deceit unto their own eternal ruin, Jude declares: Verse 4, "Ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness." And we have had dreadful instances of it in the days of temptation wherein we have lived.

Indeed, in opposition unto this deceit lies much of the *wisdom* of faith and power of gospel grace. When the mind is fully possessed with, and cast habitually and firmly into, the mould of the notion and doctrine of gospel truth about the full and free forgiveness of all sins in the blood of Christ, then to be able to keep the heart always in a deep, humbling sense of sin, abhorrency of it, and self-abasement for it, is a great effect of gospel wisdom and grace. This is the trial and touchstone of gospel light:—If it keep the heart sensible of sin, humble, lowly, and broken on that account,—if it teach us to water a free pardon with tears, to detest forgiven sin, to watch diligently for the ruin of that which we are yet assured shall never ruin us,—it is divine, from above, of the Spirit of grace. If it secretly and insensibly make men loose and slight in their thoughts about sin, it is adulterate, selfish, false. If it will be all, answer all ends, it is nothing.

Hence it comes to pass that sometimes we see men walking in a *bondage-frame of spirit* all their days, low in their light, mean in their apprehensions of grace; so that it is hard to discern whether cove-

Digitized by Google

nant in their principles they belong unto,—whether they are under the law or under grace; yet walk with a more conscientious tenderness of sinning than many who are advanced into higher degrees of light and knowledge than they;—not that the saving light of the gospel is not the only principle of saving holiness and obedience; but that, through the deceitfulness of sin, it is variously abused to countenance the soul in manifold neglect of duties, and to draw off the mind from a due consideration of the nature, desert, and danger of sin. And this is done several ways:—

1*st.* The soul, having frequent need of relief by gospel grace against a sense of the guilt of sin and accusation of the law, comes at length to make it *a common and ordinary thing*, and such as may be slightly performed. Having found a good medicine for its wounds, and such as it hath had experience of its efficacy, it comes to apply it slightly, and rather skinneth over than cureth its sores. A little less earnestness, a little less diligence, serves every time, until the soul, it may be, begins to secure itself of pardon in course; and this tends directly to draw off the mind from its constant and universal watchfulness against sin. He whose light hath made his way of access plain for the obtaining of pardon, if he be not very watchful, he is far more apt to become overly formal and careless in his work than he who, by reason of mists and darkness, beats about to find his way aright to the throne of grace; as a man that hath often travelled a road passeth on without regard or inquiry, but he who is a stranger unto it, observing all turnings and inquiring of all passengers, secures his journey beyond the other.

2*dly.* The deceitfulness of sin takes advantage from the *doctrine of grace* by many ways and means to extend the bounds of the soul's liberty beyond what God hath assigned unto it. Some have never thought themselves free from a legal, bondage frame until they have been brought into the *confines* of sensuality, and some into the *depths* of it. How often will sin plead, "This strictness, this exactness, this solicitude is no ways needful; relief is provided in the gospel against such things! Would you live as though there were no need of the gospel? as though pardon of sin were to no purpose?" But concerning these pleas of sin from gospel grace, we shall have occasion to speak more hereafter in particular.

3*dly.* In times of temptation, this deceitfulness of sin will argue expressly *for sin* from gospel grace; at least, it will plead for these two things:—

(1*st.*) That there is not need of such a tenacious, severe contending against it, as the principle of the new creature is fixed on. If it cannot divert the soul or mind wholly from attending unto temptations to oppose them, yet it will endeavour to draw them off as to the

Digitized by Google

manner of their attendance. They need not use that diligence which at first the soul apprehends to be necessary.

(2*dly.*) It will be tendering relief as to the event of sin,—that it shall not turn to the ruin or destruction of the soul, because it is, it will, or may be, pardoned by the grace of the gospel. And this is true; this is the great and only relief of the soul against sin, the guilt whereof it hath contracted already,—the blessed and only remedy for a guilty soul. But when it is pleaded and remembered by the deceitfulness of sin in compliance with temptation unto sin, then it is poison; poison is mixed in every drop of this balsam, to the danger, if not death, of the soul. And this is the first way whereby the deceitfulness of sin draws off the mind from a due attendance unto that sense of its vileness which alone is able to keep it in that humble, self-abased frame that is acceptable with God. It makes the mind careless, as though its work were needless, because of the abounding of grace; which is a soldier's neglect of his station, trusting to a reserve, provided, indeed, only in case of keeping his own proper place.

[2.] Sin takes advantage to work by its deceit, in this matter of drawing off the mind from a due sense of it, from the state and condition of men in the world. I shall give only one instance of its procedure in this kind. Men, in their younger days, have naturally their affections more quick, vigorous, and active, more sensibly working in them, than afterward. They do, as to their sensible working and operation, naturally decay, and many things befall men in their lives that take off the edge and keenness of them. But as men lose in their affections, if they are not besotted in sensuality or by the corruptions that are in the world through lust, they grow and improve in their understandings, resolutions, and judgments. Hence it is, that if what had place formerly in their affections do not take place in their minds and judgments, they utterly lose them, they have no more place in their souls. Thus men have no regard for, yea, they utterly despise, those things which their affections were set upon with delight and greediness in their childhood. But if they are things that by any means come to be fixed in their minds and judgments, they continue a high esteem for them, and do cleave as close unto them as they did when their affections were more vigorous; only, as it were, they have changed their seat in the soul. It is thus in things spiritual. The first and chiefest seat of the sensibleness of sin is in the *affections*. As these in natural youth are great and large, so are they spiritually in spiritual youth: Jer. ii. 2, "I remember the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals." Besides, such persons are newly come off from their convictions, wherein they have been cut to the heart, and so made tender. What-

Digitized by Google

ever touches upon a wound is throughly felt; so doth the guilt of sin before the wound given by conviction be throughly cured. But now, when affections begin to decay naturally, they begin to decay also as to their sensible actings and motions in things spiritual. Although they improve in grace, yet they may decay in sense. At least, spiritual sense is not radically in them, but only by way of communication. Now, in these decays, if the soul take not care to fix a deep sense of sin on the mind and judgment, thereby perpetually to affect the heart and affections, it will decay. And here the deceit of the law of sin interposeth itself. It suffers a sense of sin to decay in the affections, and diverts the mind from entertaining a due, constant, fixed consideration of it. We may consider this a little in persons that never make a progress in the ways of God beyond conviction. How sensible of sin will they be for a season! How will they then mourn and weep under a sense of the guilt of it! How will they cordially and heartily resolve against it! Affections are vigorous, and, as it were, bear rule in their souls. But they are like an herb that will flourish for a day or two with watering although it have no root: for, a while after, we see that these men, the more experience they have had of sin, the less they are afraid of it, as the wise man intimates, Eccles. viii. 11; and at length they come to be the greatest contemners of sin in the world. No sinner like him that hath sinned away his convictions of sin. What is the reason of this? Sense of sin was in their convictions, fixed on their affections. As it decayed in them, they took no care to have it deeply and graciously fixed on their minds. This the deceitfulness of sin deprived them of, and so ruined their souls. In some measure it is so with believers. If, as the sensibleness of the affections decay, if, as they grow heavy and obtuse, great wisdom and grace be not used to fix a due sense of sin upon the mind and judgment, which may provoke, excite, enliven, and stir up the affections every day, great decays will ensue. At first sorrow, trouble, grief, fear, affected the mind, and would give it no rest. If afterward the mind do not affect the heart with sorrow and grief, the whole will be cast out, and the soul be in danger of being hardened. And these are some of the ways whereby the deceit of sin diverts the mind from the first part of its safe preserving frame, or draws it off from its constant watchfulness against sin and all the effects of it.

(2.) The second part of this general duty of the mind is to keep the soul unto a constant, holy consideration of God and his grace. This evidently lies at the spring-head of gospel obedience. The way whereby sin draws off the mind from this part of its duty is open and known sufficiently, though not sufficiently watched against. Now, this the Scripture everywhere declares to be the filling of the minds

Digitized by Google

of men with earthly things. This it placeth in direct opposition unto that heavenly frame of the mind which is the spring of gospel obedience: Col. iii. 2, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth;" or set your minds. As if he had said, "On both together you cannot be set or fixed, so as principally and chiefly to mind them both." And the affections to the one and the other, proceeding from these different principles of minding the one and the other, are opposed, as directly inconsistent: 1 John ii. 15, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." And actings in a course suitable unto these affections are proposed also as contrary: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." These are two masters whom no man can serve at the same time to the satisfaction of both. Every inordinate minding, then, of earthly things is opposed unto that frame wherein our minds ought to be fixed on God and his grace in a course of gospel obedience.

Several ways there are whereby the deceitfulness of sin draws off the mind in this particular; but the chief of them is by pressing these things on the mind under the notion of things lawful, and, it may be, necessary. So all those who excuse themselves in the parable from coming in to the marriage-feast of the gospel, did it on account of their being engaged in their lawful callings,—one about his farm, another his oxen,—the means whereby he ploughed in this world. By this plea were the minds of men drawn off from that frame of heavenliness which is required to our walking with God; and the rules of not loving the world, or using it as if we used it not, are hereby neglected. What wisdom, what watchfulness, what serious frequent trial and examination of ourselves is required, to keep our hearts and minds in a heavenly frame, in the use and pursuit of earthly things, is not my present business to declare. This is evident, that the engine whereby the deceit of sin draws off and turns aside the mind in this matter is the pretence of the lawfulness of things about which it would have it exercise itself; against which very few are armed with sufficient diligence, wisdom, and skill. And this is the first and most general attempt that indwelling sin makes upon the soul by deceit,—it draws away the mind from a diligent attention unto its course in a due sense of the evil of sin, and a due and constant consideration of God and his grace.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX.

The deceit of sin in drawing off the mind from a due attendance unto especial duties of obedience, instanced in meditation and prayer.

How[1] sin by its deceit endeavours to draw off the mind from attending unto that holy frame in walking with God wherein the soul ought to be preserved, hath been declared; proceed we now to show how it doth the same work in reference unto those *especial duties* by which the designs, workings, and prevalency of it may in an especial manner be obviated and prevented. Sin, indeed, maintains an enmity against all duties of obedience, or rather with God in them. "When I would do good," saith the apostle, "evil is present with me;"—"Whenever I would do good, or what good soever I would do, (that is, spiritually good, good in reference unto God), it is present with me to hinder me from it, to oppose me in it." And, on the other side, all duties of obedience do lie directly against the actings of the law of sin; for as the flesh in all its actings lusteth against the Spirit, so the Spirit in all its actings lusteth against the flesh. And therefore every duty performed in the strength and grace of the Spirit is contrary to the law of sin: Rom. viii. 13, "If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the flesh." Actings of the Spirit of grace in duties doth this work. These two are contrary. But yet there are some duties which, in their own nature and by God's appointment, have a peculiar influence into the weakening and subduing the whole law of sin in its very principles and chiefest strengths; and these the mind of a believer ought principally in his whole course to attend unto; and these doth sin in its deceit endeavour principally to draw off the mind from. As in diseases of the body, some remedies, they say, have a specific quality against distempers; so, in this disease of the soul, there are some duties that have an especial virtue against this sinful distemper. I shall not insist on many of them, but instance only in two, which seem to me to be of this nature,—namely, that by God's designation they have a special tendency towards the ruin of the law of sin. And then we shall show the ways, methods, and means, which the law of sin useth to divert the mind from a due attendance unto them. Now, these duties are,—first, *Prayer*, especially private prayer; and, secondly, *Meditation*. I put them together, because they much agree in their general nature and end, differing only in the manner of their performance; for by meditation I intend meditating upon what respect and suit-

[1] At the head of this paragraph the numeral 2. ought to have stood, in order to unfold the division begun on page 217, line 20. Great complexity would be occasioned in the subsequent numeration if it were inserted, and it does not appear in the original edition. Each chapter is generally made to contain its own series of numerals.—Ed.

Digitized by Google

ableness there is between the word and our own hearts, to this end, that they may be brought to a more exact conformity. It is our pondering on the truth as it is in Jesus, to find out the image and representation of it in our own hearts; and so it hath the same intent with prayer, which is to bring our souls into a frame in all things answering the mind and will of God. They are as the blood and spirits in the veins, that have the same life, motion, and use. But yet, because persons are generally at a great loss in this duty of meditation, having declared it to be of so great efficacy for the controlling of the actings of the law of sin, I shall in our passage give briefly two or three rules for the directing of believers to a right performance of this great duty, and they are these:—

1. *Meditate of God with God;* that is, when we would undertake thoughts and meditations of God, his excellencies, his properties, his glory, his majesty, his love, his goodness, let it be done in a way of speaking unto God, in a deep humiliation and abasement of our souls before him. This will fix the mind, and draw it forth from one thing to another, to give glory unto God in a due manner, and affect the soul until it be brought into that holy admiration of God and delight in him which is acceptable unto him. My meaning is, that it be done in a way of prayer and praise,—speaking unto God.

2. *Meditate on the word in the word;* that is, in the reading of it, consider the sense in the particular passages we insist upon, looking to God for help, guidance, and direction, in the discovery of his mind and will therein, and then labour to have our hearts affected with it.

3. What we come short of in evenness and constancy in our thoughts in these things, let it be made up in frequency. Some are discouraged because their minds do not regularly supply them with thoughts to carry on their meditations, through the weakness or imperfection of their inventions. Let this be supplied by frequent returns of the mind unto the subject proposed to be meditated upon, whereby new senses will still be supplied unto it. But this by the way.

These duties, I say, amongst others (for we have only chosen them for an instance, not excluding some others from the same place, office, and usefulness with them), do make an *especial opposition* to the very being and life of indwelling sin, or rather faith in them doth so. They are perpetually designing its utter ruin. I shall, therefore, upon this instance, in the pursuit of our present purpose, do these two things:—(1.) Show the suitableness and *usefulness* of this duty, or these duties (as I shall handle them jointly), unto the ruining of sin. (2.) Show the *means* whereby the deceitfulness of sin endeavours to draw off the mind from a due attendance unto them.

(1.) For the first, observe,—

[1.] That it is the proper work of the soul, in this duty, to consider

Digitized by Google

all the *secret workings* and actings of sin, what advantages it hath got, what temptations it is in conjunction withal, what harm it hath already done, and what it is yet farther ready to do. Hence David gives that title unto one of his prayers: Ps. cii., "A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the LORD." I speak of that prayer which is attended with a due consideration of all the wants, straits, and emergencies of the soul. Without this, prayer is not prayer; that is, whatever show or appearance of that duty it hath, it is no way useful, either to the glory of God or the good of the souls of men. A cloud it is without water, driven by the wind of the breath of men. Nor was there ever any more present and effectual poison for souls found out than the binding of them unto a constant form and usage of I know not what words in their prayers and supplications, which themselves do not understand. Bind men so in their trades or in their businesses in this world, and they will quickly find the effect of it. By this means are they disenabled from any due consideration of what at present is good for them or evil unto them; without which, to what use can prayer serve, but to mock God and delude men's own souls? But in this kind of prayer which we insist on, the Spirit of God falls in to give us his assistance, and that in this very matter of finding out and discovering the most secret actings and workings of the law of sin: Rom. viii. 26, "We know not what we should pray for as we ought, but he helpeth our infirmities;" he discovers our wants unto us, and wherein chiefly we stand in need of help and relief. And we find it by daily experience, that in prayer believers are led into such discoveries and convictions of the secret deceitful work of sin in their hearts, as no considerations could ever have led them into. So David, Ps. li., designing the confession of his actual sin, having his wound in his prayer searched by the skilful hand of the Spirit of God, he had a discovery made unto him of the root of all his miscarriages, in his original corruption, verse 5. The Spirit in this duty is as the candle of the Lord unto the soul, enabling it to search all the inward parts of the belly. It gives a holy, spiritual light into the mind, enabling it to search the deep and dark recesses of the heart, to find out the subtle and deceitful machinations, figments, and imaginations of the law of sin therein. Whatever notion there be of it, whatever power and prevalency in it, it is laid hand on, apprehended, brought into the presence of God, judged, condemned, bewailed. And what can possibly be more effectual for its ruin and destruction? for, together with its discovery, application is made unto all that relief which in Jesus Christ is provided against it, all ways and means whereby it may be ruined. Hence, it is the duty of the mind to "watch unto prayer," 1 Pet. iv. 7, to attend diligently unto the estate of our

Digitized by Google

souls, and to deal fervently and effectually with God about it. The like also may be said of meditation, wisely managed unto its proper end.

[2.] In this duty there is wrought upon the heart a deep, full sense of the *vileness of sin*, with a constant renewed detestation of it; which, if any thing, undoubtedly tends to its ruin. This is one design of prayer, one end of the soul in it,—namely, to draw forth sin, to set it in order, to present it unto itself in its vileness, abomination, and aggravating circumstances, that it may be loathed, abhorred, and cast away as a filthy thing; as Isa. xxx. 22. He that pleads with God for sin's remission, pleads also with his own heart for its detestation, Hos. xiv. 3. Herein, also, sin is judged in the name of God; for the soul in its confession subscribes unto God's detestation of it, and the sentence of his law against it. There is, indeed, a course of these duties which convinced persons do give up themselves unto as a mere covert to their lusts; they cannot sin quietly unless they perform duty constantly. But that prayer we speak of is a thing of another nature, a thing that will allow no composition with sin, much less will serve the ends of the deceit of it, as the other, formal prayer, doth. It will not be bribed into a secret compliance with any of the enemies of God or the soul, no, not for a moment. And hence it is that oftentimes in this duty the heart is raised to the most sincere, effectual sense of sin and detestation of it that the soul ever obtains in its whole course of obedience. And this evidently tends also to the weakening and ruin of the law of sin.

[3.] This is the way appointed and blessed of God to obtain strength and power against sin: James i. 5, "Doth any man lack? let him ask of God." Prayer is the way of obtaining from God by Christ a supply of all our wants, assistance against all opposition, especially that which is made against us by sin. This, I suppose, need not be insisted on; it is, in the notion and practice, clear to every believer. It is that wherein we call, and upon which the Lord Jesus comes in to our succour with suitable "help in time of need," Heb. iv. 16.

[4.] Faith in prayer *countermines* all the workings of the deceit of sin; and that because the soul doth therein constantly engage itself unto God to oppose all sin whatsoever: Ps. cxix. 106, "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments." This is the language of every gracious soul in its addresses unto God: the inmost parts thereof engage themselves to God, to cleave to him in all things, and to oppose sin in all things. He that cannot do this cannot pray. To pray with any other frame is to flatter God with our lips, which he abhorreth. And this exceedingly helps a believer in pursuing sin unto its ruin; for,—

1*st*. If there be any secret lust that lies lurking in the heart, he

Digitized by Google

will find it either rising up against this engagement, or using its artifices to secure itself from it. And hereby it is discovered, and the conviction of the heart concerning its evil furthered and strengthened. Sin makes the most certain discovery of itself; and never more evidently than when it is most severely pursued. Lusts in men are compared to hurtful and noisome beasts; or men themselves are so because of their lusts, Isa. xi. 4–6. Now, such beasts use themselves to their dens and coverts, and never discover themselves, at least so much in their proper nature and rage, as when they are most earnestly pursued. And so it is with sin and corruption in the heart.

2*dly*. If any sin be prevalent in the soul, it will weaken it, and take it off from the universality of this engagement unto God; it will breed a tergiversation unto it, a slightness in it. Now, when this is observed, it will exceedingly awaken a gracious soul, and stir it up to look about it. As spontaneous lassitude, or a causeless weariness and indisposition of the body, is looked on as the sign of an approaching fever or some dangerous distemper, which stirs up men to use a timely and vigorous prevention, that they be not seized upon by it, so is it in this case. When the soul of a believer finds in itself an indisposition to make fervent, sincere engagements of universal holiness unto God, it knows that there is some prevalent distemper in it, finds the place of it, and sets itself against it.

3*dly*. Whilst the soul can thus constantly engage itself unto God, it is certain that sin can rise unto no ruinous prevalency. Yea, it is a conquest over sin, a most considerable conquest, when the soul doth fully and clearly, without any secret reserve, come off with alacrity and resolution in such an engagement; as Ps. xviii. 23. And it may upon such a success triumph in the grace of God, and have good hope, through faith, that it shall have a final conquest, and what it so resolves shall be done; that it hath decreed a thing, and it shall be established. And this tends to the disappointment, yea, to the ruin of the law of sin.

4*thly*. If the heart be not deceived by cursed hypocrisy, this engagement unto God will greatly influence it unto a peculiar diligence and watchfulness against all sin. There is no greater evidence of hypocrisy than to have the heart like the whorish woman, Prov. vii. 14,—to say, "'I have paid my vows,' now I may take myself unto my sin;" or to be negligent about sin, as being satisfied that it hath prayed against it. It is otherwise in a gracious soul. Sense and conscience of engagements against sin made to God, do make it universally watchful against all its motions and operations. On these and sundry other accounts doth faith in this duty exert itself peculiarly to the weakening of the power and stopping of the progress of the law of sin.

Digitized by Google

If, then, the mind be diligent in its watch and charge to preserve the soul from the efficacy of sin, it will carefully attend unto this duty and the due performance of it, which is of such singular advantage unto its end and purpose. Here, therefore,—

(2.) Sin puts forth its deceit in its own defence. It labours to divert and draw off the mind from attending unto this and the like duties. And there are, among others, three engines, three ways and means, whereby it attempts the accomplishment of its design:—

[1.] It makes advantage of its weariness unto the flesh. There is an *aversation*, as hath been declared, in the law of sin unto all immediate communion with God. Now, this duty is such. There is nothing accompanieth it whereby the carnal part of the soul may be gratified or satisfied, as there may be somewhat of that nature in most public duties, in most that a man can do beyond pure acts of faith and love. No relief or advantage, then, coming in by it but what is purely spiritual, it becomes wearisome, burdensome to flesh and blood. It is like travelling alone without companion or diversion, which makes the way seem long, but brings the passenger with most speed to his journey's end. So our Saviour declares, when, expecting his disciples, according to their duty and present distress, should have been engaged in this work, he found them fast asleep: Matt. xxvi. 41, "The spirit," saith he, "indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak;" and out of that weakness grew their indisposition unto and weariness of their duty. So God complains of his people: Isa. xliii. 22, "Thou hast been weary of me." And it may come at length unto that height which is mentioned, Mal. i. 13, "Ye have said, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts." The Jews suppose that it was the language of men when they brought their offerings or sacrifices on their shoulders, which they pretended wearied them, and they panted and blowed as men ready to faint under them, when they brought only the torn, and the lame, and the sick. But so is this duty oftentimes to the flesh. And this the deceitfulness of sin makes use of to draw the heart by insensible degrees from a constant attendance unto it. It puts in for the relief of the weak and weary flesh. There is a compliance between *spiritual flesh* and *natural flesh* in this matter,—they help one another; and an aversation unto this duty is the effect of their compliance. So it was in the spouse, Cant. v. 2, 3. She was asleep, drowsing in her *spiritual condition*, and pleads her *natural unfitness* to rouse herself from that state. If the mind be not diligently watchful to prevent insinuations from hence,—if it dwell not constantly on those considerations which evidence an attendance unto this duty to be indispensable,—if it stir not up the principle of grace in the heart to retain its rule and sovereignty, and not

Digitized by Google

to be dallied withal by foolish pretences,—it will be drawn off; which is the effect aimed at.

[2.] The deceitfulness of sin makes use of corrupt reasonings, taken from the pressing and urging *occasions of life*. "Should we," says it in the heart, "attend strictly unto all duties in this kind, we should neglect our principal occasions, and be useless unto ourselves and others in the world." And on this general account, particular businesses dispossess particular duties from their due place and time. Men have not leisure to glorify God and save their own souls. It is certain that God gives us time enough for all that he requires of us in any kind in this world. No duties need to jostle one another, I mean constantly. Especial occasions must be determined according unto especial circumstances. But if in any thing we take more upon us than we have time well to perform it in, without robbing God of that which is due to him and our own souls, this God calls not unto, this he blesseth us not in. It is more tolerable that our duties of holiness and regard to God should intrench upon the duties of our callings and employments in this world than on the contrary; and yet neither doth God require this at our hands, in an ordinary manner or course. How little, then, will he bear with that which evidently is so much worse upon all accounts whatever! But yet, through the deceitfulness of sin, thus are the souls of men beguiled. By several degrees they are at length driven from their duty.

[3.] It deals with the mind, to draw it off from its attendance unto this duty, by a tender of a *compensation* to be made in and by other duties; as Saul thought to compensate his disobedience by sacrifice. "*May not the same duty performed in public or in the family suffice?*" And if the soul be so foolish as not to answer, "*Those things ought to be done, and this not to be left undone,*" it may be ensnared and deceived. For, besides a command unto it, namely, that we should personally "watch unto prayer," there are, as hath been declared, sundry advantages in this duty so performed against the deceit and efficacy of sin, which in the more public attendance unto it it hath not. These sin strives to deprive the soul of by this commutation, which by its corrupt reasonings it tenders unto it.

[4.] I may add here that which hath place in all the workings of sin by deceit,—namely, its feeding the soul with *promises* and purposes of a more diligent attendance unto this duty when occasions will permit. By this means it brings the soul to say unto its convictions of duty, as Felix did to Paul, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." And by this means oftentimes the present season and time, which alone is ours, is lost irrecoverably.

These are some of the ways and means whereby the deceit of sin

Digitized by Google

endeavours to draw off the mind from its due attendance unto this duty, which is so peculiarly suited to prevent its progress and prevalency, and which aims so directly and immediately at its ruin. I might instance also in other duties of the like tendency; but this may suffice to discover the nature of this part of the deceit of sin. And this is the first way whereby it makes way for the farther entangling of the affections and the conception of sin. When sin hath wrought this effect on any one, he is said to be "drawn away," to be diverted from what in his mind he ought constantly to attend unto in his walking before the Lord.

And this will instruct us to see and discern where lies the beginning of our declensions and failings in the ways of God, and that either as to our general course or as to our attendance unto especial duties. And this is of great importance and concernment unto us. When the beginnings and occasions of a sickness or distemper of body are known, it is a great advantage to direct in and unto the cure of it. God, to recall Zion to himself, shows her where was the "beginning of her sin," Mic. i. 13. Now, this is that which for the most part is the beginning of sin unto us, even the drawing off the mind from a due attendance in all things unto the discharge of its duty. The principal care and charge of the soul lies on the mind; and if that fail of its duty, the whole is betrayed, either as unto its general frame or as unto particular miscarriages. The failing of the mind is like the failing of the watchman in Ezekiel; the whole is lost by his neglect. This, therefore, in that self-scrutiny and search which we are called unto, we are most diligently to inquire after. God doth not look at what duties we perform, as to their number and tale, or as to their nature merely, but whether we do them with that intension of mind and spirit which he requireth. Many men perform duties in a road or course, and do not, as it were, so much as think of them; their minds are filled with other things, only duty takes up so much of their time. This is but an endeavour to mock God and deceive their own souls. Would you, therefore, take the true measure of yourselves, consider how it is with you as to the duty of your minds which we have inquired after. Consider whether, by any of the deceits mentioned, you have not been diverted and drawn away; and if there be any decays upon you in any kind, you will find that *there* hath been the beginning of them. By one way or other your minds have been made heedless, regardless, slothful, uncertain, being beguiled and drawn off from their duty. Consider the charge, Prov. iv. 23, 25–27. May not such a soul say, "If I had attended more diligently; if I had considered more wisely the vile nature of sin; if I had not suffered my mind to be possessed with vain hopes and foolish imaginations, by a cursed abuse of gospel grace; if I had not

Digitized by Google

permitted it to be filled with the things of the world, and to become negligent in attending unto especial duties,—I had not at this day been thus sick, weak, thriftless, wounded, decayed, defiled. My careless, my deceived mind, hath been the *beginning of sin* and transgression unto my soul." And this discovery will direct the soul unto a suitable way for its healing and recovery; which will never be effected by a multiplying of particular duties, but by a restoring of the mind, Ps. xxiii. 3.

And this, also, doth hence appear to be the great means of preserving our souls, both as unto their general frame and particular duties, according to the mind and will of God,—namely, to endeavour after a sound and steadfast mind. It is a signal grace to have "the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind," 2 Tim. i. 7;—a stable, solid, resolved mind in the things of God, not easily moved, diverted, changed, not drawn aside; a mind not apt to hearken after corrupt reasonings, vain insinuations, or pretences to draw it off from its duty. This is that which the apostle exhorts believers unto: 1 Cor. xv. 58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." The steadfastness of our minds abiding in their duty is the cause of all our unmovableness and fruitfulness in obedience; and so Peter tells us that those who are by any means led away or enticed, "they fall from their own steadfastness," 2 Pet. iii. 17. And the great blame that is laid upon backsliders is, that they are not steadfast: Ps. lxxviii. 37, "Their heart was not steadfast." For if the soul be safe, unless the mind be drawn off from its duty, the soundness and steadfastness of the mind is its great preservative. And there are three parts of this steadfastness of the mind:—First, A full purpose of cleaving to God in all things; secondly, A daily renovation and quickening of the heart unto a discharge of this purpose; thirdly, Resolutions against all dalliances or parleys about negligences in that discharge;—which are not here to be spoken unto.

CHAPTER X.

The deceit of sin, in drawing off the mind from its attendance unto particular duties, farther discovered—Several things required in the mind of believers with respect unto particular duties of obedience—The actings of sin, in a way of deceit, to divert the mind from them.

WE have not as yet brought unto an issue the first way of the working of the deceit of sin,—namely, in its drawing away of the

Digitized by Google

mind from the discharge of its duty, which we insist upon the longer upon a double account:—

First, Because of its importance and concernment. If the mind be drawn off, if it be tainted, weakened, turned aside from a due and strict attendance unto its charge and office, the whole soul, will, and affections are certainly entangled and drawn into sin; as hath been in part declared, and will afterward farther appear. This we ought therefore to give diligent heed unto; which is the design of the apostle's exhortation: Heb. ii. 1, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." It is a failure of our minds, by the deceitfulness of sin, in losing the life, power, sense, and impression of the word, which he cautions us against. And there is no way to prevent it but by giving of most "earnest heed unto the things which we have heard;" which expresseth the whole duty of our minds in attending unto obedience.

Secondly, Because the actings and workings of the mind being spiritual, are such as the conscience, unless clearly enlightened and duly excited and stirred up, is not affected withal, so as to take due notice of them. Conscience is not apt to exercise reflex acts upon the mind's failures, as principally respecting the acts of the whole soul. When the affections are entangled with sin (of which afterward), or the will begins to conceive it by its express consent, conscience is apt to make an uproar in the soul, and to give it no rest or quiet until the soul be reclaimed, or itself be one way or other bribed or debauched; but these neglects of the mind being spiritual, without very diligent attendance they are seldom taken notice of. Our minds are often in the Scriptures called our *spirits*,—as Rom. i. 9, "Whom I serve with my spirit;" and are distinguished from the soul, which principally intends the affections in that distribution, 1 Thess. v. 23, "Sanctify you wholly, your whole spirit and soul,"—that is, your mind and affections. It is true, where the [word] "spirit" is used to express spiritual gifts, it is, as unto those gifts, opposed to our "understanding," 1 Cor. xiv. 15, which is there taken for the first act of the mind in a rational perception of things; but as that word is applied unto any faculty of our souls, it is the mind that it expresseth. This, then, being our spirit, the actings of it are secret and hidden, and not to be discovered without spiritual wisdom and diligence. Let us not suppose, then, that we dwell too long on this consideration, which is of so great importance to us, and yet so hidden, and which we are apt to be very insensible of; and yet our carefulness in this matter is one of the best evidences that we have of our sincerity. Let us not, then, be like a man that is sensible, and complains of a cut finger, but not of a decay of spirits tending unto death. There remains there-

Digitized by Google

fore, as unto this head of our discourse, the consideration of the charge of the mind in reference unto particular duties and sins; and in the consideration of it we shall do these two things: 1. Show what is required in the mind of a believer in reference unto particular duties. 2. Declare the way of the working of the deceit of sin, to draw it off from its attendance thereunto. The like also shall be done with respect unto particular sins, and their avoidance:—

1. For the right performance of any duty, it is not enough that the thing itself required be performed, but that it be universally squared and fitted unto the rule of it. Herein lies the great duty of the mind,—namely, to attend unto the *rule* of duties, and to take care that all the concernments of them be ordered thereby. Our progress in obedience is our edification or building. Now, it is but a very little furtherance unto a building, that a man bring wood and stones, and heap them up together without order; they must be hewed and squared, and fitted by line and rule, if we intend to build. Nor is it unto any advantage unto our edification in faith and obedience that we multiply duties, if we heap them upon one another, if we order and dispose them not according to rule; and therefore doth God expressly reject a multitude of duties, when not universally suited unto the rule: Isa. i. 11, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices?" and, verse 14, "They are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them." And therefore all acceptable obedience is called a proceeding according unto "rule," Gal. vi. 16; it is a canonical or regular obedience. As letters in the alphabet heaped together signify nothing, unless they are disposed into their proper order, no more do our duties without this disposal. That they be so is the great duty of the mind, and which with all diligence it is to attend unto: Eph. v. 15, "Walk circumspectly," exactly, accurately, that is, diligently, in all things; take heed to the rule of what you do. We walk in duties, but we walk circumspectly in this attention of the mind.

(1.) There are some special things which the rule directs unto that the mind is to attend in every duty. As,—

[1.] That, as to the *matter* of it, it be full and complete. Under the law no beast was allowed to be a sacrifice that had any member wanting, any defect of parts. Such were rejected, as well as those that were lame or blind. Duties must be complete as to the parts, the matter of them. There may be such a part of the price kept back as may make the tendering of all the residue unacceptable. Saul sparing Agag and the fattest of the cattle, rendered the destroying of all the rest useless. Thus, when men will give alms, or perform other services, but not unto the proportion that the rule requireth, and which the mind by diligent attention unto it might discover, the whole duty is vitiated.

Digitized by Google

[2.] As to the *principle* of it,—namely, that it be done in faith, and therein by an actual derivation of strength from Christ, John xv. 5, without whom we can do nothing. It is not enough that the person be a believer, though that be necessary unto every good work, Eph. ii. 10, but also that faith be peculiarly acted in every duty that we do; for our whole obedience is the "obedience of faith," Rom. i. 5,—that is, which the doctrine of faith requireth, and which the grace of faith beareth or bringeth forth. So Christ is expressly said to be "our life," Col. iii. 4, our spiritual life; that is, the spring, author, and cause of it. Now, as in life natural, no vital act can be performed but by the actual operation of the principle of life itself; so, in life spiritual, no spiritually-vital act,—that is, no duty acceptable to God,—can be performed but by the actual working of Christ, who is our life. And this is no other way derived unto us but by faith; whence saith the apostle, Gal. ii. 20, "Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." Not only was Christ his life, a living principle unto him, but he led a life,—that is, discharged vital actions in all duties of holiness and obedience,—by the faith of the Son of God, or in him, deriving supplies of grace and strength from him thereby. This, therefore, ought a believer diligently to attend unto,—namely, that everything he doth to God be done in the strength of Christ; which wherein it consisteth ought diligently to be inquired into by all who intend to walk with God.

[3.] In this respect unto rule, the *manner* of the performance of every duty is to be regarded. Now, there are two things in the manner of the performance of any duty which a believer, who is trusted with spiritual light, ought to attend unto:—

1*st*. That it be done in *the way* and by the means that God hath prescribed with respect unto the outward manner of its performance. And this is especially to be regarded in duties of the worship of God, the matter and outward manner whereof do both equally fall under his command. If this be not regarded, the whole duty is vitiated. I speak not of them who suffer themselves to be deluded by the deceitfulness of sin, utterly to disregard the rule of the word in such things, and to worship God according to their own imaginations; but of them principally who, although they in general profess to do nothing but *what* God requires, and *as* he requires it, yet do not diligently attend to the rule, to make the authority of God to be the sole cause and reason both of what they do and of the manner of the performance of it. And this is the reason that God so often calls on his people to consider diligently and wisely, that they may do all according as he had commanded.

2*dly*. The affections of the heart and mind in duties belong to the

Digitized by Google

performance of them in the inward manner. The prescriptions and commands of God for attendance hereunto are innumerable, and the want hereof renders every duty an abomination unto him. A sacrifice without a heart, without salt, without fire, of what value is it? No more are duties without spiritual affections. And herein is the mind to keep the charge of God,—to see that the heart which he requires be tendered to him. And we find, also, that God requireth especial affections to accompany special duties: "He that giveth, with cheerfulness;" which, if they are not attended unto, the whole is lost.

[4.] The mind is to attend unto the *ends* of duties, and therein principally the glory of God in Christ. Several other ends will sin and self impose upon our duties: especially two it will press hard upon us with,—first, *Satisfaction of our convictions* and consciences; secondly, *The praise of men;* for self-righteousness and ostentation are the main ends of men that are fallen off from God in all moral duties whatsoever. In their sins they endeavour for to satisfy their lusts; in their duties, their conviction and pride. These the mind of a believer is diligently to watch against, and to keep up in all a single eye to the glory of God, as that which answers the great and general rule of all our obedience: "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." These and the like things, I say, which are commonly spoken unto, is the mind of a believer obliged to attend diligently and constantly unto, with respect unto all the particular duties of our walking before God. Here, then, lies no small part of the deceit of sin,—namely, to draw the mind off from this watch, to bring an inadvertency upon it, that it shall not in these things keep the watch and charge of the Lord. And if it can do so, and thereby strip our duties of all their excellencies, which lie in these concernments of them, that the mind is to attend unto, it will not much trouble itself nor us about the duties themselves. And this it attempts several ways:—

1*st.* By persuading the mind to content itself with *generals*, and to take it off from attending unto things in particular instances. For example, it would persuade the soul to rest satisfied in a *general aim* of doing things to the glory of God, without considering how every particular duty may have that tendency. Thus Saul thought that he had fulfilled his own duty, and done the will of God, and sought his glory in his war against Amalek, when, for want of attendance to every particular duty in that service, he had dishonoured God, and ruined himself and his posterity. And men may persuade themselves that they have a general design for the glory of God, when they have no active principle in particular duties tending at all that way. But if, instead of fixing the mind by faith on the peculiar advancing the

Digitized by Google

glory of God in a duty, the soul content itself with a *general notion* of doing so, the mind is already diverted and drawn off from its charge by the deceitfulness of sin. If a man be travelling in a journey, it is not only required of him that he bend his course that way, and so go on; but if he attend not unto every turning, and other occurrences in his way, he may wander and never come to his journey's end. And if we suppose that in general we aim at the glory of God, as we all profess to do, yet if we attend not unto it distinctly upon every duty that occurs in our way, we shall never attain the end aimed at. And he who satisfies himself with this *general* purpose, without acting it in every *special* duty, will not long retain that purpose neither. It doth the same work upon the mind, in reference unto the principle of our duties, as it doth unto the end. Their principle is, that they be done in faith, in the strength of Christ; but if men content themselves that they are believers, that they have faith, and do not labour in every particular duty to act faith, to lead their spiritual lives, in all the acts of them, by the faith of the Son of God, the mind is drawn off from its duty. It is particular actions wherein we express and exercise our faith and obedience; and what we are in them, that we are, and no more.

2*dly.* It draws off the mind from the duties before mentioned by insinuating a secret *contentment* into it from the duty itself performed, as to the matter of it. This is a fair discharge of a natural conscience. If the duty be performed, though as to the manner of its performance it come short almost in all things of the rule, conscience and conviction will be satisfied; as Saul, upon his expedition against Amalek, cries to Samuel, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; 'I have performed the commandment of the Lord.'" He satisfied himself, though he had not attended as he ought to the whole will of God in that matter. And thus was it with them, Isa. lviii. 3, "Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou regardest it not?" They had pleased themselves in the performance of their duties, and expected that God also should be pleased with them. But he shows them at large wherein they had failed, and that so far as to render what they had done an abomination; and the like charge he expresseth against them, chap. xlviii. 1, 2. This the deceitfulness of sin endeavours to draw the mind unto, namely, to take up in the performance of the duty itself. "Pray thou oughtst, and thou hast prayed; give alms thou oughtst, and thou hast given alms; quiet, then, thyself in what thou hast done, and go on to do the like." If it prevail herein the mind is discharged from farther attendance and watching unto duty, which leaves the soul on the borders of many evils; for,—

3*dly.* Hence *customariness* in all duties will quickly ensue, which

Digitized by Google

is the height of sin's drawing off the mind from duty: for men's minds may be drawn from all duties, in the midst of the most abundant performance of them; for in and under them the mind may be subject unto an habitual diversion from its charge and watch unto the rule. What is done with such a frame is not done to God, Amos v. 25. None of their sacrifices were to God, although they professed that they were all so. But they attended not unto his worship in faith, and unto his glory, and he despised all their duties. See also Hos. x. 1. And this is the great reason why professors thrive so little under the performance of a multitude of duties:—They attend not unto them in a due manner, their minds being drawn off from their circumspect watch; and so they have little or no communion with God in them, which is the end whereunto they are designed, and by which alone they become useful and profitable unto themselves. And in this manner are many duties of worship and obedience performed by a woful generation of hypocrites, formalists, and profane persons, without either life or light in themselves, or acceptation with God, their minds being wholly estranged from a due attendance unto what they do by the power and deceitfulness of sin.

2. As it is in respect of duties, so also it is in respect of *sins*. There are sundry things in and about *every sin* that the mind of a believer, by virtue of its office and duty, is obliged to attend diligently unto, for the preservation of the soul from it. Things they are which God hath appointed and sanctified, to give effectual rebukes and checks to the whole working of the law of sin, and such as, in the law of grace, under which we are, are exceedingly suited and fitted unto that purpose. And these the deceit of sin endeavours by all means to draw off the mind from a due consideration of and attendance unto. Some few of them we shall a little reflect upon:—

(1.) The first and most general is the *sovereignty* of God, the great lawgiver, by whom it is forbidden. This Joseph fixed on in his great temptation: Gen. xxxix. 9, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" There was in it a great evil, a great ingratitude against man, which he pleads also and insists upon, verses 8, 9; but that which fixed his heart and resolution against it was the formality of it, that it was sin against God, by whom it was severely forbidden. So the apostle informs us that in our dealing in any thing that is against the law, our respect is still to be unto the Lawgiver and his sovereignty: James iv. 11, 12, "If thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy." Consider this always: there is one lawgiver, holy, righteous, armed with sovereign power and authority; he is able to save and destroy. Hence sin is called

Digitized by Google

a rebellion, a casting off his yoke, a despising of him, and that in his sovereignty as the great lawgiver; and this ought the mind always practically to attend unto, in all the lustings, actings, and suggestions of the law of sin, especially when advantaged by any suitable or vigorous temptation: "It is *God that hath forbidden this thing;* the great lawgiver, under whose absolute sovereignty I am, in dependence on whom I live, and by whom I am to be disposed of, as to my present and eternal condition." This Eve fixed on at the beginning of her temptation, "God hath said, Ye shall not eat of this tree," Gen. iii. 3; but she kept not her ground, she abode not by that consideration, but suffered her mind to be diverted from it by the subtlety of Satan, which was the entrance of her transgression: and so it is unto us all in our deviations from obedience.

(2.) The *deceit* of sin, of every sin, the *punishment* appointed unto it in the law, is another thing that the mind ought actually to attend unto, in reference unto every particular evil. And the diversions from this, that the minds of men have been doctrinally and practically attended withal, have been an inlet into all manner of abominations. Job professeth another frame in himself, chap. xxxi. 23, "Destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure." Many evils he had mentioned in the foregoing verses, and pleads his innocency from them, although they were such as, upon the account of his greatness and power, he could have committed easily without fear of danger from men. Here he gives the reason that prevailed with him so carefully to abstain from them, "Destruction from God was a terror to me, and by reason of his highness I could not endure." "I considered," saith he, "that God had appointed 'death and destruction' for the punishment of sin, and that such was his greatness, highness, and power, that he could inflict it unto the uttermost, in such a way as no creature is able to abide or to avoid." So the apostle directs believers always to consider what a "fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God," Heb. x. 31; and that because he hath said, "Vengeance is mine, I will recompense," verse 30. He is a sin-avenging God, that will by no means acquit the guilty; as in the declaration of his gracious name, infinitely full of encouragements to poor sinners in Christ, he adds that in the close, that "he will by no means clear the guilty," Exod. xxxiv. 7,—that he may keep upon the minds of them whom he pardoneth a due sense of the punishment that is due from his vindictive justice unto every sin. And so the apostle would have us mind that even "our God is a consuming fire," Heb. xii. 29; that is, that we should consider his holiness and vindictive justice, appointing unto sin a meet recompense of reward. And men's breaking through this consideration he reckons as the height of the aggrava-

Digitized by Google

tion of their sins: Rom. i. 32, "They knew that it is the judgment of God, that they which commit such things were worthy of death, yet continued to do them." What hope is there for such persons? There is, indeed, relief against this consideration for humbled believing souls in the blood of Christ; but this relief is not to take off the mind from it as it is appointed of God to be a restraint from sin. And both these considerations, even the sovereignty of God and the punishment of sin, are put together by our Saviour: Matt. x. 28, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

(3.) The consideration of all *the love and kindness* of God, against whom every sin is committed, is another thing that the mind ought diligently to attend unto; and this is a prevailing consideration, if rightly and graciously managed in the soul. This Moses presseth on the people: Deut. xxxii. 6, "Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people and unwise? is not he thy Father that bought thee? hath he not made thee, and established thee?"—"Is this a requital for eternal love, and all the fruits of it? for the love and care of a Father, of a Redeemer, that we have been made partakers of?" And it is the same consideration which the apostle manageth to this purpose, 2 Cor. vii. 1, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." The receiving of the promises ought to be effectual, as to stir us up unto all holiness, so to work and effect an abstinence from all sin. And what promises are these?—namely, that "God will be a Father unto us, and receive us," chap. vi. 17, 18; which compriseth the whole of all the love of God towards us here and to eternity. If there be any spiritual ingenuity in the soul, whilst the mind is attentive to this consideration, there can be no prevailing attempt made upon it by the power of sin. Now, there are two parts of this consideration:—

[1.] That which is general in it, that which is common unto all believers. This is managed unto this purpose, 1 John iii. 1–3, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." "Consider," saith he, "the love of God, and the privileges that we enjoy by it: 'Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.' Adoption is an especial fruit of it, and how great a privilege is this! Such love it is, and such are the fruits of it, that the

Digitized by Google

world knoweth nothing of the blessed condition which we obtain and enjoy thereby: 'The world knoweth us not.' Nay, it is such love, and so unspeakably blessed and glorious are the effects of it, that we ourselves are not able to comprehend them." What use, then, ought we to make of this contemplation of the excellent, unspeakable love of God? Why, saith he, "Every one that hath this hope purifieth himself." Every man who has been made partaker of this love, and thereupon a hope of the full enjoyment of the fruits of it, of being made like to God in glory, "purifieth himself,"—that is, in an abstinence from all and every sin, as in the following words is at large declared.

[2.] It is to be considered as to such *peculiar mercies* and fruits of love as every one's soul hath been made partaker of. There is no believer but, besides the love and mercy which he hath in common with all his brethren, hath also in the lot of his inheritance some enclosures, some especial mercies, wherein he hath a single propriety. He hath some joy which no stranger intermeddleth withal, Prov. xiv. 10,—particular applications of covenant love and mercy to his soul. Now, these are all provisions laid in by God, that they may be borne in mind against an hour of temptation,—that the consideration of them may preserve the soul from the attempts of sin. Their neglect is a high aggravation of our provocations. 1 Kings xi. 9, it is charged as the great evil of Solomon, that he had sinned against special mercies, especial intimations of love; he sinned after God had "appeared unto him twice." God required that he should have borne in mind that especial favour, and have made it an argument against sin; but he neglected it, and is burdened with this sore rebuke. And, indeed, all especial mercies, all especial tokens and pledges of love, are utterly lost and misspent upon us, if they are not improved unto this end. This, then, is another thing that it is the duty of the mind greatly to attend unto, and to oppose effectually unto every attempt that is made on the soul by the law of sin.

(4.) The considerations that arise from *the blood and mediation of Christ* are of the same importance. So the apostle declares, 2 Cor. v. 14, 15, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." There is a constraining efficacy in this consideration; it is great, forcible, effectual, if duly attended unto. But I must not here in particular insist upon these things; nor,—

(5.) Shall I speak of the *inhabitation of the Spirit*,—the greatest privilege that we are made partakers of in this world. The due consideration how he is grieved by sin; how his dwelling-place is defiled

Digitized by Google

thereby; how his comforts are forfeited, lost, despised by it,—might also be insisted on: but the instances passed through are sufficient unto our purpose. Now, herein lies the duty of the mind in reference unto particular sins and temptations:—It is diligently and carefully to attend unto these things; to dwell constantly upon the consideration of them; to have them in a continual readiness to oppose unto all the lustings, actings, warrings, attempts, and rage of sin.

In reference hereunto doth *sin* in an especial manner put forth and act its deceit. It labours by all means to draw off the mind from its due attendance unto these things,—to deprive the soul of this great preservative and antidote against its poison. It endeavours to cause the soul to satisfy itself with general undigested notions about sin, that it may have nothing in particular to betake itself unto in its own defence against its attempts and temptations. And the ways whereby it doth this may be also briefly considered:—

[1.] It is from the deceit of sin that the mind is *spiritually slothful*, whereby it becomes negligent unto this duty. The principal discharge of its trust in this matter is expressed by *watching;* which is the great caution that the Lord Jesus gave unto his disciples in reference unto all their dangers from sin and Satan: Mark xiii. 37, "I say unto all, Watch;" that is, "Use your utmost diligence and circumspection, that you be not surprised and entangled with temptations." It is called also *consideration:* "Consider your ways,"—"Consider your latter end;" the want whereof God complains of in his people, Deut. xxxii. 29. Now, that which is contrary to these indispensable conditions of our preservation is spiritual slothfulness, as the apostle declares, Heb. vi. 11, 12, "And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful." If we show not diligence, we are slothful, and in danger of coming short to inherit the promises. See 2 Pet. i. 5–11, "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; to virtue knowledge," etc. "For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." All this the mind is turned from, if once, by the deceit of sin, it be made slothful. Now, this sloth consists in four things:—

1*st. Inadvertency.* It doth not set itself to consider and attend unto its special concernments. The apostle, persuading the Hebrews

Digitized by Google

with all earnestness to attend diligently, to consider carefully, that they may not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, gives this reason of their danger, that they were "dull of hearing," chap. v. 11; that is, that they were slothful, and did not attend unto the things of their duty. A secret *regardlessness* is apt to creep upon the soul, and it doth not set itself to a diligent marking how things go with it, and what is continually incumbent on it.

2*dly.* An *unwillingness to be stirred up unto its duty.* Prov. xix. 24, "A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again." There is an unwillingness in *sloth* to take any notice of warnings, calls, excitations, or stirrings up by the word, Spirit, judgments, any thing that God maketh use of to call the mind unto a due consideration of the condition of the soul. And this is a perfect evidence that the mind is made slothful by the deceit of sin, when especial calls and warnings, whether in a suitable word or a pressing judgment, cannot prevail with it to pull its hand out of its bosom; that is, to set about the special duties that it is called unto.

3*dly. Weak and ineffectual attempts* to recover itself unto its duty. Prov. xxvi. 14, "As the door turneth upon its hinges, so doth the slothful man upon his bed." In the turning of a door upon its hinges, there is some motion but no progress. It removes up and down, but is still in the place and posture that it was. So is it with the spiritually slothful man on his bed, or in his security. He makes some motions or faint endeavours towards a discharge of his duty, but goes not on. There where he was one day, there he is the next; yea, there where he was one year, he is the next. His endeavours are faint, cold, and eyanid; he gets no ground by them, but is always beginning and never finishing his work.

4*thly. Heartlessness upon the apprehensions of difficulties* and discouragements. Prov. xxii. 13, "The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets." Every difficulty deters him from duty. He thinks it impossible for him to attain to that accuracy, exactness, and perfection which he is in this matter to press after; and therefore contents himself in his old coldness, negligence, rather than to run the hazard of a universal circumspection. Now, if the deceit of sin hath once drawn away the mind into this frame, it lays it open to every temptation and incursion of sin. The spouse in the Canticles seems to have been overtaken with this distemper, chap. v. 2, 3; and this puts her on various excuses why she cannot attend unto the call of Christ, and apply herself unto her duty in walking with him.

[2.] It draws away the mind from its watch and duty in reference unto sin by *surprisals.* It falls in conjunction with some urging

Digitized by Google

temptation, and surpriseth the mind into thoughts quite of another nature than those which it ought to insist upon in its own defence. So it seems to have been with Peter: his carnal fear closing with the temptation wherein Satan sought to winnow him, filled his mind with so many thoughts about his own imminent danger, that he could not take into consideration the love and warning of Christ, nor the evil whereunto his temptation led him, nor any thing that he ought to have insisted on for his preservation. And, therefore, upon a review of his folly in neglecting those thoughts of God and the love of Christ which, through the assistance of the Holy Ghost, might have kept him from his scandalous fall, he wept bitterly. And this is the common way of the working of the deceit of sin as unto particular evils:—It lays hold on the mind suddenly with thoughtfulness about the present sin, possesseth it, takes it up; so that either it recovers not itself at all to the considerations mentioned, or if any thoughts of them be suggested, the mind is so prepossessed and filled that they take no impression on the soul or make no abode in it. Thus, doubtless, was David surprised in the entrance of his great sin. Sin and temptation did so possess and fill his mind with the present object of his lust, that he utterly forgot, as it were, those considerations which he had formerly made use of when he so diligently kept himself from his iniquity. Here, therefore, lies the great wisdom of the soul, in rejecting the very first motions of sin, because by parleys with them the mind may be drawn off from attending unto its preservatives, and so the whole rush into evil.

[3.] It draws away the mind by *frequency and long continuance* of its solicitations, making as it were at last a conquest of it. And this happens not without an open neglect of the soul, in want of stirring up itself to give an effectual rebuke, in the strength and by the grace of Christ, unto sin; which would have prevented its prevalency. But of this more shall be spoken afterwards.

And this is the first way whereby the law of sin acts its deceit against the soul:—It draws off the mind from attendance unto its charge and office, both in respect of duty and sin. And so far as this is done, the person is said to be "drawn away" or drawn off. He is "tempted;" every man is tempted, when he is thus drawn away by his own lust, or the deceit of sin dwelling in him. And the whole effect of this working of the deceitfulness of sin may be reduced unto these three heads:—

1. The *remission of a universally watchful frame of spirit* unto every duty, and against all, even the most hidden and secret, actings of sin.

2. The *omission of peculiar attending unto* such duties as have an especial respect unto the weakening and ruin of the whole law of sin, and the obviating of its deceitfulness.

Digitized by Google

3. *Spiritual sloth*, as to a diligent regard unto all the especial concernments of duties and sins.

When these three things, with their branches mentioned, less or more, are brought about, in or upon the soul, or so far as they are so, so far a man is drawn off by his own lust or the deceit of sin.

There is no need of adding here any directions for the prevention of this evil; they have sufficiently been laid down in our passage through the consideration both of the duty of the mind, and of the deceit of sin.

CHAPTER XI.

The working of sin by deceit to entangle the affections—The ways whereby it is done—Means of their prevention.

THE second thing in the words of the apostle ascribed unto the *deceitful working of sin* is its *enticing*. A man is "drawn away and enticed." And this seems particularly to respect the affections, as drawing away doth the mind. The mind is drawn away from duty, and the affections are enticed unto sin. From the prevalency hereof a man is said to be "enticed," or entangled as with a bait: so the word imports; for there is an allusion in it unto the bait wherewith a fish is taken on the hook which holds him to his destruction. And concerning this effect of the deceit of sin, we shall briefly show two things: 1. *What it is to be enticed*, or to be entangled with the bait of sin, to have the affections tainted with an inclination thereunto; and when they are so. 2. *What course sin takes*, and what way it proceedeth in, thus to entice, ensnare, or entangle the soul:—

1. For the first,—

(1.) The affections are certainly entangled when *they stir up frequent imaginations* about the proposed object which this deceit of sin leadeth and enticeth towards. When sin prevails, and the affections are gone fully after it, it fills the imagination with it, possessing it with images, likenesses, appearances of it continually. Such persons "devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds;" which they also "practise" when they are able, when "it is in the power of their hand," Micah ii. 1. As, in particular, Peter tells us that "they have eyes full of an adulteress,[1] and they cannot cease from sin," 2 Pet. ii. 14, —that is, their imaginations are possessed with a continual representation of the object of their lusts. And it is so in part where the

[1] Marginal reading in the authorized version.—ED.

Digitized by Google

affections are in part entangled with sin, and begin to turn aside unto it. John tells us that the things that are "in the world" are "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," 1 Epist. ii. 16. The lust of the eyes is that which by them is conveyed unto the soul. Now, it is not the bodily sense of seeing, but the fixing of the imagination from that sense on such things, that is intended. And this is called the "eyes," because thereby things are constantly represented unto the mind and soul, as outward objects are unto the inward sense by the eyes. And oftentimes the outward sight of the eyes is the occasion of these imaginations. So Achan declares how sin prevailed with him, Josh. vii. 21. First, he *saw* the wedge of gold and Babylonish garment, and then he *coveted* them. He rolled them, the pleasures, the profit of them, in his imagination, and then fixed his heart upon the obtaining of them. Now, the heart may have a settled, fixed detestation of sin; but yet, if a man find that the imagination of the mind is frequently solicited by it and exercised about it, such a one may know that his affections are secretly enticed and entangled.

(2.) This entanglement is heightened when the imagination can prevail with the mind to lodge vain thoughts in it, with secret delight and *complacency*. This is termed by casuists, "Cogitatio morosa cum delectatione,"—an abiding thought with delight; which towards forbidden objects is in all cases actually sinful. And yet this may be when the *consent of the will unto sin* is not obtained,—when the soul would not for the world do the thing, which yet thoughts begin to lodge in the mind about. This "lodging of vain thoughts" in the heart the prophet complains of as a thing greatly sinful, and to be abhorred, Jer. iv. 14. All these thoughts are messengers that carry sin to and fro between the imagination and the affections, and still increase it, inflaming the imagination, and more and more entangling the affections. Achan thinks upon the golden wedge, this makes him like it and love it; by loving of it his thoughts are infected, and return to the imagination of its worth and goodly show; and so by little and little the soul is inflamed unto sin. And here if the will parts with its sovereignty, sin is actually conceived.

(3.) Inclinations or readiness to attend unto *extenuations of sin*, or the reliefs that are tendered against sin when committed, manifest the affections to be entangled with it. We have showed, and shall yet farther evidence, that it is a great part of the deceit of sin, to tender lessening and extenuating thoughts of sin unto the mind. "Is it not a little one?" or, "There is mercy provided;" or, "It shall be in due time relinquished and given over," is its language in a deceived heart. Now, when there is a readiness in the soul to hearken and give entertainment unto such secret insinuations, arising from this

Digitized by Google

deceit, in reference unto any sin or unapprovable course, it is an evidence that the affections are enticed. When the soul is willing, as it were, to be tempted, to be courted by sin, to hearken to its dalliances and solicitations, it hath lost of its conjugal affections unto Christ, and is entangled. This is "looking on the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright," Prov. xxiii. 31;—a pleasing contemplation on the invitations of sin, whose end the wise man gives us, verse 32. When the deceit of sin hath prevailed thus far on any person, then he is enticed or entangled. The will is not yet come to the actual conception of this or that sin by its consent, but the whole soul is in a near inclination thereunto. And many other instances I could give as tokens and evidences of this entanglement: these may suffice to manifest what we intend thereby.

2. Our next inquiry is, *How*, or by what means, the deceit of sin proceeds thus to entice and entangle the affections? And two or three of its baits are manifest herein:—

(1.) It makes use of its former prevalency upon the mind in drawing it off from its watch and circumspection. Says the wise man, Prov. i. 17, "Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird;" or "before the eyes of every thing that hath a wing," as in the original. If it hath eyes open to discern the snare, and a wing to carry it away, it will not be caught. And in vain should the deceit of sin spread its snares and nets for the entanglement of the soul, whilst the eyes of the mind are intent upon what it doth, and so stir up the wings of its will and affections to carry it away and avoid it. But if the eyes be put out or diverted, the wings are of very little use for escape; and, therefore, this is one of the ways which is used by them who take birds or fowls in their nets. They have false lights or shows of things, to divert the sight of their prey; and when that is done, they take the season to cast their nets upon them. So doth the deceit of sin; it first draws off and diverts the mind by false reasonings and pretences, as hath been showed, and then casts its net upon the affections for their entanglement.

(2.) Taking advantage of such seasons, it proposeth sin as *desirable*, as exceeding satisfactory to the corrupt part of our affections. It gilds over the object by a thousand pretences, which it presents unto corrupt lustings. This is the laying of a bait, which the apostle in this verse evidently alludes unto. A bait is somewhat desirable and suitable, that is proposed to the hungry creature for its satisfaction; and it is by all artifices rendered desirable and suitable. Thus is sin presented by the help of the imagination unto the soul; that is, sinful and inordinate objects, which the affections cleave unto, are so presented. The apostle tells us that there are "pleasures of sin,"

Digitized by Google

Heb. xi. 25; which, unless they are despised, as they were by Moses, there is no escaping of sin itself. Hence they that live in sin are said to "live in pleasure," James v. 5. Now, this pleasure of sin consisteth in its suitableness to give satisfaction to the flesh, to lust, to corrupt affections. Hence is that caution, Rom. xiii. 14, "Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof;" that is, "Do not suffer your minds, thoughts, or affections to fix upon sinful objects, suited to give satisfaction to the lusts of the flesh, to nourish and cherish them thereby." To which purpose he speaks again, Gal. v. 16, "Fulfil ye not the lust of the flesh;"—"Bring not in the pleasures of sin, to give them satisfaction." When men are under the power of sin, they are said to "fulfil the desires of the flesh and of the mind," Eph. ii. 3. Thus, therefore, the deceit of sin endeavours to entangle the affections by proposing unto them, through the assistance of the imagination, that suitableness which is in it to the satisfaction of its corrupt lusts, now set at some liberty by the inadvertency of the mind. It presents its "wine sparkling in the cup," the beauty of the adulteress, the riches of the world, unto sensual and covetous persons; and somewhat in the like kind, in some degrees, to believers themselves. When, therefore, I say, sin would entangle the soul, it prevails with the imagination to solicit the heart, by representing this false-painted beauty or pretended satisfactoriness of sin; and then if Satan, with any peculiar temptation, fall in to its assistance, it oftentimes inflames all the affections, and puts the whole soul into disorder.

(3.) It *hides the danger* that attends sin; it covers it as the hook is covered with the bait, or the net spread over with meat for the fowl to be taken. It is not, indeed, possible that sin should utterly deprive the soul of the knowledge of the danger of it. It cannot dispossess it of its notion or persuasion that "the wages of sin is death," and that it is the "judgment of God that they that commit sin are worthy of death." But this it will do,—it will so take up and possess the mind and affections with the baits and desirableness of sin, that it shall divert them from an actual and practical contemplation of the danger of it. What Satan did in and by his first temptation, that sin doth ever since. At first Eve guards herself with calling to mind the danger of sin: "If we eat or touch it we shall die," Gen. iii. 3. But so soon as Satan had filled her mind with the beauty and usefulness of the fruit to make one wise, how quickly did she lay aside her practical prevalent consideration of the danger of eating it, the curse due unto it; or else relieves herself with a vain hope and pretence that it should not be, because the serpent told her so! So was David beguiled in his great transgression by the deceit of sin. His lust being pleased and satisfied, the consideration of the guilt and

Digitized by Google

danger of his transgression was taken away; and therefore he is said to have "despised the LORD," 2 Sam. xii. 9, in that he considered not the evil that was in his heart, and the danger that attended it in the threatening or commination of the law. Now sin, when it presseth upon the soul to this purpose, will use a thousand wiles to hide from it the terror of the Lord, the end of transgressions, and especially of that peculiar folly which it solicits the mind unto. *Hopes of pardon* shall be used to hide it; and *future repentance* shall hide it; and *present importunity* of lust shall hide it; *occasions and opportunities* shall hide it; *surprisals* shall hide it; *extenuation* of sin shall hide it; *balancing of duties* against it shall hide it; *fixing the imagination* on present objects shall hide it; *desperate resolutions* to venture the uttermost for the enjoyment of lust in its pleasures and profits shall hide it. A thousand wiles it hath, which cannot be recounted.

(4.) Having prevailed thus far, gilding over the pleasures of sin, hiding its end and demerit, it proceeds to raise *perverse reasonings* in the mind, to fix it upon the sin proposed, that it may be conceived and brought forth, the affections being already prevailed upon; of which we shall speak under the next head of its progress.

Here we may stay a little, as formerly, to give some few directions for the obviating of this woful work of the deceitfulness of sin. Would we not be enticed or entangled? would we not be disposed to the conception of sin? would we be turned out of the road and way which goes down to death?—let us take heed of our affections; which are of so great concernment in the whole course of our obedience, that they are commonly in the Scripture called by the name of the *heart*, as the principal thing which God requires in our walking before him. And this is not slightly to be attended unto. Prov. iv. 23, saith the wise man, "Keep thy heart with all diligence;" or, as in the original, "above" or "before all keepings;"—"Before every watch, keep thy heart. You have many keepings that you watch unto: you watch to keep your lives, to keep your estates, to keep your reputations, to keep up your families; but," saith he, "*above all these keepings*, prefer that, attend to that of the heart, of your affections, that they be not entangled with sin." There is no safety without it. Save all other things and lose the heart, and all is lost,—lost unto all eternity. You will say, then, "What shall we do, or how shall we observe this duty?"

1. Keep your affections as to their *object*.

(1.) In *general*. This advice the apostle gives in this very case, Col. iii. His advice in the beginning of that chapter is to direct us unto the mortification of sin, which he expressly engageth in: Verse 5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth;"—"Prevent the working and deceit of sin which wars in your members."

Digitized by Google

To prepare us, to enable us hereunto, he gives us that great direction: Verse 2, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." Fix your affections upon heavenly things; this will enable you to mortify sin; fill them with the things that are above, let them be exercised with them, and so enjoy the chiefest place in them. They are above, blessed and suitable objects, meet for and answering unto our affections;—God himself, in his beauty and glory; the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "altogether lovely, the chiefest of ten thousand;" grace and glory; the mysteries revealed in the gospel; the blessedness promised thereby. Were our affections filled, taken up, and possessed with these things, as it is our duty that they should be,—it is our happiness when they are,—what access could sin, with its painted pleasures, with its sugared poisons, with its envenomed baits, have unto our souls? how should we loathe all its proposals, and say unto them, "Get ye hence as an abominable thing!" For what are the vain, transitory pleasures of sin, in comparison of the exceeding recompense of reward which is proposed unto us? Which argument the apostle presses, 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

(2.) As to the object of your affections, in an *especial manner*, let it be the cross of Christ, which hath exceeding efficacy towards the disappointment of the whole work of indwelling sin: Gal. vi. 14, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereby the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." The cross of Christ he gloried and rejoiced in; this his heart was set upon; and these were the effects of it,—it crucified the world unto him, made it a dead and undesirable thing. The baits and pleasures of sin are taken all of them out of the world, and the things that are in the world,—namely, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." These are the things that are in the world; from these doth sin take all its baits, whereby it enticeth and entangleth our souls. If the heart be filled with the cross of Christ, it casts death and undesirableness upon them all; it leaves no seeming beauty, no appearing pleasure or comeliness, in them. Again, saith he, "It crucifieth me to the world; makes my heart, my affections, my desires, dead unto any of these things." It roots up corrupt lusts and affections, leaves no principle to go forth and make provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. Labour, therefore, to fill your hearts with the cross of Christ. Consider the sorrows he underwent, the curse he bore, the blood he shed, the cries he put forth, the love that was in all this to your souls, and the mystery of the grace of God therein. Meditate on the vileness, the demerit, and punishment of sin as represented in the cross, the blood, the death of Christ. Is Christ crucified for sin, and shall not our hearts be crucified with him unto sin? Shall we give entertainment unto that, or hearken unto its

Digitized by Google

dalliances, which wounded, which pierced, which slew our dear Lord Jesus? God forbid! Fill your affections with the cross of Christ, that there may be no room for sin. The world once put him out of the house into a stable, when he came to save us; let him now turn the world out of doors, when he is come to sanctify us.

2. Look to the *vigour of the affections* towards heavenly things; if they are not constantly attended, excited, directed, and warned, they are apt to decay, and sin lies in wait to take every advantage against them. Many complaints we have in the Scripture of those who lost their first love, in suffering their affections to decay. And this should make us jealous over our own hearts, lest we also should be overtaken with the like backsliding frame. Wherefore be jealous over them; often strictly examine them and call them to account; supply unto them due considerations for their exciting and stirring up unto duty.

CHAPTER XII.

The conception of sin through its deceit—Wherein it consisteth—The consent of the will unto sin—The nature thereof—Ways and means whereby it is obtained—Other advantages made use of by the deceit of sin—Ignorance—Error.

THE third success of the deceit of sin in its progressive work is the *conception of actual sin.* When it hath drawn the mind off from its duty, and entangled the affections, it proceeds to conceive sin in order to the bringing of it forth: "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin." Now, the conception of sin, in order unto its perpetration, can be nothing but the consent of the will; for as without the consent of the will sin cannot be committed, so where the will hath consented unto it, there is nothing in the soul to hinder its actual accomplishment. God doth, indeed, by various ways and means, frustrate the bringing forth of these adulterate conceptions, causing them to melt away in the womb, or one way or other prove abortive, so that not the least part of that sin is committed which is willed or conceived; yet there is nothing in the soul itself that remains to give check unto it when once the will hath given its consent. Ofttimes, when a cloud is full of rain and ready to fall, a wind comes and drives it away; and when the will is ready to bring forth its sin, God diverts it by one wind or other: but yet the cloud was as full of rain as if it had fallen, and the soul as full of sin as if it had been committed.

Digitized by Google

This conceiving of lust or sin, then, is its prevalency in obtaining the consent of the will unto its solicitations. And hereby the soul is defloured of its chastity towards God in Christ, as the apostle intimates, 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3. To clear up this matter we must observe,—

1. That the *will* is the principle, the next seat and cause, of *obedience* and *disobedience*. Moral actions are unto us or in us so far good or evil as they partake of the consent of the will. He spake truth of old who said, "Omne peccatum est adeo voluntarium, ut non sit peccatum nisi sit voluntarium;"—"Every sin is so voluntary, that if it be not voluntary it is not sin." It is most true of actual sins. The formality of their iniquity ariseth from the acts of the will in them and concerning them,—I mean, as to the persons that commit them; otherwise in itself the formal reason of sin is its aberration from the law of God.

2. There is a *twofold consent of the will* unto sin:—

(1.) That which is *full, absolute,* complete, and upon deliberation, —a prevailing consent; the convictions of the mind being conquered, and no principle of grace in the will to weaken it. With this consent the soul goes into sin as a ship before the wind with all its sails displayed, without any check or stop. It rusheth into sin like the horse into the battle; men thereby, as the apostle speaks, "giving themselves over to sin with greediness," Eph. iv. 19. Thus Ahab's will was in the murdering of Naboth. He did it upon deliberation, by contrivance, with a full consent; the doing of it gave him such satisfaction as that it cured his malady or the distemper of his mind. This is that consent of the will which is acted in the finishing and completing of sin in unregenerate persons, and is not required to the single bringing forth of sin, whereof we speak.

(2.) There is a consent of the will which is attended with a secret *renitency* and volition of the contrary. Thus Peter's will was in the denying of his Master. His will was in it, or he had not done it. It was a voluntary action, that which he chose to do at that season. Sin had not been brought forth if it had not been thus conceived. But yet, at this very time, there was resident in his will a contrary principle of love to Christ, yea, and faith in him, which utterly failed not. The efficacy of it was intercepted, and its operations suspended actually, through the violent urging of the temptation that he was under; but yet it was in his will, and weakened his consent unto sin. Though it consented, it was not done with self-pleasing, which such full acts of the will do produce.

3. Although there may be a *predominant consent in the will,* which may suffice for the conception of particular sins, yet there cannot be an absolute, total, full consent of the will of a believer unto any sin; for,—

Digitized by Google

(1.) There is in his will a principle fixed on good, on all good: Rom. vii. 21, "He would do good." The principle of grace in the will inclines him to all good. And this, in general, is prevalent against the principle of sin, so that the will is denominated from thence. Grace hath the rule and dominion, and not sin, in the will of every believer. Now, that consent unto sin in the will which is contrary to the inclination and generally prevailing principle in the same will, is not, cannot be, total, absolute, and complete.

(2.) There is not only a general, ruling, prevailing principle in the will against sin, but there is also a *secret reluctancy* in it against its own act in consenting unto sin. It is true, the soul is not sensible sometimes of this reluctancy, because the present consent carries away the prevailing act of the will, and takes away the sense of the lusting of the Spirit, or reluctancy of the principle of grace in the will. But the general rule holdeth in all things at all times: Gal. v. 17, "The Spirit lusteth against the flesh." It doth so actually, though not always to the same degree, nor with the same success; and the prevalency of the contrary principle in this or that particular act doth not disprove it. It is so on the other side. There is no acting of grace in the will but sin lusts against it; although that lusting be not made sensible in the soul, because of the prevalency of the contrary acting of grace, yet it is enough to keep those actings from perfection in their kind. So is it in this renitency of grace against the acting of sin in the soul; though it be not sensible in its operations, yet it is enough to keep that act from being full and complete. And much of spiritual wisdom lies in discerning aright between the spiritual renitency of the principle of grace in the will against sin, and the rebukes that are given the soul by conscience upon conviction for sin.

4. Observe, that reiterated, repeated acts of the consent of the will unto sin may beget a disposition and inclinableness in it unto the like acts, that may bring the will unto *a proneness and readiness* to consent unto sin upon easy solicitations; which is a condition of soul dangerous, and greatly to be watched against.

5. This consent of the will, which we have thus described, may be considered two ways:—(1.) As it is exercised about the circumstances, causes, means, and inducements unto sin. (2.) As it respects this or that actual sin.

In the first sense there is a virtual consent of the will unto sin in every inadvertency unto the prevention of it, in every neglect of duty that makes way for it, in every hearkening unto any temptation leading towards it; in a word, in all the diversions of the mind from its duty, and entanglements of the affections by sin, before mentioned: for where there is no act of the will, *formally* or *virtu-*

Digitized by Google

ally, there is no sin. But this is not that which we now speak of; but, in particular, the consent of the will unto this or that actual sin, so far as that either sin is committed, or is prevented by other ways and means not of our present consideration. And herein consists the conceiving of sin.

These things being supposed, that which in the next place we are to consider is, the *way* that the deceit of sin proceedeth in to procure the consent of the will, and so to conceive actual sin in the soul. To this purpose observe:—

1. That the *will is a rational appetite*,—rational as guided by the mind, and an appetite as excited by the affections; and so in its operation or actings hath respect to both, is influenced by both.

2. It chooseth nothing, consents to nothing, but "sub ratione boni,"—as it hath *an appearance of good*, some present good. It cannot consent to any thing under the notion or apprehension of its being evil in any kind. Good is its natural and necessary object, and therefore whatever is proposed unto it for its consent must be proposed under an appearance of being either good in itself, or good at present unto the soul, or good so circumstantiate as it is; so that,—

3. We may see hence the reason why the conception of sin is here placed as a consequent of the mind's being drawn away and the affections being entangled. Both these have an influence into the consent of the will, and the conception of this or that actual sin thereby. Our way, therefore, here is made somewhat plain. We have seen at large how the mind is drawn away by the deceit of sin, and how the affections are entangled;—that which remains is but the proper effect of these things; for the discovery whereof we must instance in some of the special deceits, corrupt and fallacious reasonings before mentioned, and then show their prevalency on the will to a consent unto sin:—

(1.) The will is imposed upon by that corrupt reasoning, that *grace is exalted in a pardon*, and that mercy is provided for sinners. This first, as hath been showed, deceives the mind, and that opens the way to the will's consent by removing a sight of evil, which the will hath an aversation unto. And this, in carnal hearts, prevails so far as to make them think that their liberty consists in being "servants of corruption," 2 Pet. ii. 19. And the poison of it doth oftentimes taint and vitiate the minds of believers themselves; whence we are so cautioned against it in the Scripture. To what, therefore, hath been spoken before, unto the use and abuse of the doctrine of the grace of the gospel, we shall add some few other considerations, and fix upon one place of Scripture that will give light unto it. There is a twofold mystery of grace,—of walking with God, and of coming unto God;

Digitized by Google

and the great design of sin is to change the doctrine and mystery of grace in reference unto these things, and that by applying those considerations unto the one which are proper unto the other, whereby each part is hindered, and the influence of the doctrine of grace into them for their furtherance defeated. See 1 John ii. 1, 2: "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins." Here is the whole design and use of the gospel briefly expressed. "These things," saith he, "I write unto you." What things were these? Those mentioned, chap. i. verse 2: "The life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us,"—that is, the things concerning the person and mediation of Christ; and, verse 7, that pardon, forgiveness, and expiation from sin is to be attained by the blood of Christ. But to what end and purpose doth he write these things to them? what do they teach, what do they tend unto? A universal abstinence from sin: "I write unto you," saith he, "that ye sin not." This is the proper, only, genuine end of the doctrine of the gospel. But to abstain from all sin is not our condition in this world: verse 8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." What, then, shall be done in this case? In supposition of sin, that we have sinned, is there no relief provided for our souls and consciences in the gospel? Yes; saith he, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins." There is full relief in the propitiation and intercession of Christ for us. This is the order and method of the doctrine of the gospel, and of the application of it to our own souls:—first, to keep us from sin; and then to relieve us against sin. But here entereth the deceit of sin, and puts this "new wine into old bottles," whereby the bottles are broken, and the wine perisheth, as to our benefit by it. It changeth this method and order of the application of gospel truths. It takes up the last first, and that excludes the use of the first utterly. "If any man sin, there is pardon provided," is all the gospel that sin would willingly suffer to abide on the minds of men. When we would come to God by believing, it would be pressing the former part, of being free from sin; when the gospel proposeth the latter principally, or the pardon of sin, for our encouragement. When we are come to God, and should walk with him, it will have only the latter proposed, that there is pardon of sin; when the gospel principally proposeth the former, of keeping ourselves from sin, the grace of God bringing salvation having appeared unto us to that end and purpose.

Now, the mind being entangled with this deceit, drawn off from its

Digitized by Google

watch by it, diverted from the true ends of the gospel, doth several ways impose upon the will to obtain its consent:—

[1.] By a sudden *surprisal* in case of temptation. Temptation is the representation of a thing as a present good, a particular good, which is a real evil, a general evil. Now, when a temptation, armed with opportunity and provocation, befalls the soul, the principle of grace in the will riseth up with a rejection and detestation of it. But on a sudden, the mind being deceived by sin, breaks in upon the will with a corrupt, fallacious reasoning from gospel grace and mercy, which first staggers, then abates the will's opposition, and then causeth it to cast the scale by its consent on the side of temptation, presenting evil as a present good, and sin in the sight of God is conceived, though it be never committed. Thus is the seed of God sacrificed to Moloch, and the weapons of Christ abused to the service of the devil.

[2.] It doth it insensibly. It insinuates the poison of this corrupt reasoning by little and little, until it hath greatly prevailed. And as the whole effect of the doctrine of the gospel in holiness and obedience consists in the soul's being cast into the frame and mould of it, Rom. vi. 17; so the whole of the apostasy from the gospel is principally the casting of the soul into the mould of this false reasoning, that sin may be indulged unto upon the account of grace and pardon. Hereby is the soul gratified in sloth and negligence, and taken off from its care as to particular duties and avoidance of particular sins. It works the soul insensibly off from the mystery of the law of grace,—to look for salvation as if we had never performed any duty, being, after we have done all, unprofitable servants, with a resting on sovereign mercy through the blood of Christ, and to attend unto duties with all diligence as if we looked for no mercy; that is, with no less care, though with more liberty and freedom. This the deceitfulness of sin endeavoureth by all means to work the soul from; and thereby debaucheth the will when its consent is required unto particular sins.

(2.) The deceived mind imposeth on the will, to obtain its consent unto sin, by proposing unto it the advantages that may accrue and arise thereby; which is one medium whereby itself also is drawn away. It renders that which is *absolutely evil* a present *appearing good*. So was it with Eve, Gen. iii. Laying aside all considerations of the law, covenant and threats of God, she all at once reflects upon the advantages, pleasures, and benefits which she should obtain by her sin, and reckons them up to solicit the consent of her will. "It is," saith she, "good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and to be desired to make one wise." What should she do, then, but eat it? Her will consented, and she did so accordingly. Pleas for obedience are laid out of the way, and only the pleasures of sin are taken under consi-

Digitized by Google

deration. So saith Ahab, 1 Kings xxi., "Naboth's vineyard is near my house, and I may make it a garden of herbs; therefore I must have it." These considerations a deceived mind imposed on his will, until it made him obstinate in the pursuit of his covetousness through perjury and murder, to the utter ruin of himself and his family. Thus is the guilt and tendency of sin hid under the covert of advantages and pleasures, and so is conceived or resolved on in the soul.

As the mind being withdrawn, so the affections being enticed and entangled do greatly further the conception of sin in the soul by the consent of the will; and they do it two ways:—

[1.] By some *hasty impulse and surprisal*, being themselves stirred up, incited, and drawn forth by some violent provocation or suitable temptation, they put the whole soul, as it were, into a combustion, and draw the will into a consent unto what they are provoked unto and entangled withal. So was the case of David in the matter of Nabal. A violent provocation from the extreme unworthy carriage of that foolish churl stirs him up to wrath and revenge, 1 Sam. xxv. 13. He resolves upon it to destroy a whole family, the innocent with the guilty, verses 33, 34. Self-revenge and murder were for the season conceived, resolved, consented unto, until God graciously took him off. His entangled, provoked affections surprised his will to consent unto the conception of many bloody sins. The case was the same with Asa in his anger, when he smote the prophet; and with Peter in his fear, when he denied his Master. Let that soul which would take heed of conceiving sin take heed of entangled affections; for sin may be suddenly conceived, the prevalent consent of the will may be suddenly obtained; which gives the soul a fixed guilt, though the sin itself be never actually brought forth.

[2.] Enticed affections procure the consent of the will by *frequent solicitations*, whereby they get ground insensibly upon it, and enthrone themselves. Take an instance in the sons of Jacob, Gen. xxxvii. 4. They hate their brother, because their father loved him. Their affections being enticed, many new occasions fall out to entangle them farther, as his dreams and the like. This lay rankling in their hearts, and never ceased soliciting their wills until they resolved upon his death. The unlawfulness, the unnaturalness of the action, the grief of their aged father, the guilt of their own souls, are all laid aside. That hatred and envy that they had conceived against him ceased not until they had got the consent of their wills to his ruin. This gradual progress of the prevalency of corrupt affections to solicit the soul unto sin the wise man excellently describes, Prov. xxiii. 31–35. And this is the common way of sin's procedure in the destruction of souls which seem to have made some good engagements in the ways of God:—When it hath entangled them with one

Digitized by Google

temptation, and brought the will to some liking of it, that presently becomes another temptation, either to the neglect of some duty or to the refusal of more light; and commonly that whereby men fall off utterly from God is not that wherewith they are first entangled. And this may briefly suffice for the third progressive act of the deceit of sin. It obtains the will's consent unto its conception; and by this means are multitudes of sins conceived in the heart which very little less defile the soul, or cause it to contract very little less guilt, than if they were actually committed.

Unto what hath been spoken concerning the deceitfulness of indwelling sin in general, which greatly evidenceth its power and efficacy, I shall add, as a close of this discourse, one or two particular ways of its deceitful actings; consisting in advantages that it maketh use of, and means of relieving itself against that disquisition which is made after it by the word and Spirit for its ruin. One head only of each sort we shall here name:—

1. It makes great advantage of the *darkness of the mind*, to work out its design and intendments. The shades of a mind totally dark,—that is, devoid utterly of saving grace,—are the proper working-place of sin. Hence the effects of it are called the "works of darkness," Eph. v. 11, Rom. xiii. 12, as springing from thence. Sin works and brings forth by the help of it. The working of lust under the covert of a dark mind is, as it were, the upper region of hell; for it lies at the next door to it for filth, horror, and confusion. Now, there is a partial darkness abiding still in believers; they "know but in part," 1 Cor. xiii. 12. Though there be in them all a principle of saving light,—the day-star is risen in their hearts,—yet all the shades of darkness are not utterly expelled out of them in this life. And there are two parts, as it were, or principal effects of the remaining darkness that is in believers:—

(1.) *Ignorance*, or a nescience of the will of God, either "juris" or "facti" of the rule and law in general, or of the reference of the particular fact that lies before the mind unto the law.

(2.) *Error* and mistakes positively; taking that for truth which is falsehood, and that for light which is darkness. Now, of both of these doth the law of sin make great advantage for the exerting of its power in the soul.

(1.) Is there a remaining ignorance of any thing of the will of God? —sin will be sure to make use of it, and improve it to the uttermost. Though Abimelech were not a believer, yet he was a person that had a moral integrity with him in his ways and actions; he declares himself to have had so in a solemn appeal to God, the searcher of all hearts, even in that wherein he miscarried, Gen. xx. 5. But being ignorant that fornication was a sin, or so great a sin as that it became

Digitized by Google

not a morally honest man to defile himself with it, lust hurries him into that intention of evil in reference unto Sarah, as we have it there related. God complains that his people "perished for lack of knowledge," Hos. iv. 6. Being ignorant of the mind and will of God, they rushed into evil at every command of the law of sin. Be it as to any duty to be performed, or as to any sin to be committed, if there be in it darkness or ignorance of the mind about them, sin will not lose its advantage. Many a man, being ignorant of the duty incumbent on him for the instruction of his family, casting the whole weight of it upon the public teaching, is, by the deceitfulness of sin, brought into an habitual sloth and negligence of duty. So much ignorance of the will of God and duty, so much advantage is given to the law of sin. And hence we may see what is that true knowledge which with God is acceptable. How exactly doth many a poor soul, who is low as to notional knowledge, yet walk with God! It seems they know so much, as sin hath not on that account much advantage against them; when others, high in their notions, give advantage to their lusts, even by their ignorance, though they know it not.

(2.) *Error* is a worse part or effect of the mind's darkness, and gives great advantage to the law of sin. There is, indeed, ignorance in every error, but there is not error in all ignorance; and so they may be distinguished. I shall need to exemplify this but with one consideration, and that is of men who, being zealous for some error, do seek to suppress and persecute the truth. Indwelling sin desires no greater advantage. How will it every day, every hour, pour forth wrath, revilings, hard speeches; breathe revenge, murder, desolation, under the name perhaps of zeal! On this account we may see poor creatures pleasing themselves every day; as if they vaunted in their excellency, when they are foaming out their own shame. Under their real darkness and pretended zeal, sin sits securely, and fills pulpits, houses, prayers, streets, with as bitter fruits of envy, malice, wrath, hatred, evil surmises, false speakings, as full as they can hold. The common issue with such poor creatures is, the holy, blessed, meek Spirit of God withdraws from them, and leaves them visibly and openly to that evil, froward, wrathful, worldly spirit, which the law of sin hath cherished and heightened in them. Sin dwells not anywhere more secure than in such a frame. Thus, I say, it lays hold in particular of advantages to practise upon with its deceitfulness, and therein also to exert its power in the soul; whereof this single instance of its improving the darkness of the mind unto its own ends is a sufficient evidence.

2. It useth means of relieving itself against the pursuit that is made after it in the heart by the word and Spirit of grace. One also of its wiles, in the way of instance, I shall name in this kind, and

Digitized by Google

that is *the alleviation of its own guilt.* It pleads for itself, that it is not so bad, so filthy, so fatal as is pretended; and this course of extenuation it proceeds in two ways:—

(1.)—*Absolutely.* Many secret pleas it will have that the evil which it tends unto is not so pernicious as conscience is persuaded that it is; it may be ventured on without ruin. These considerations it will strongly urge when it is at work in a way of surprisal, when the soul hath no leisure or liberty to weigh its suggestions in the balance of the sanctuary; and not seldom is the will imposed on hereby, and advantages gotten to shift itself from under the sword of the Spirit:—"It is not such but that it may be let alone, or suffered to die of itself, which probably within a while it will do; no need of that violence which in mortification is to be offered; it is time enough to deal with a matter of no greater importance hereafter;" with other pleas like those before mentioned.

(2.) *Comparatively;* and this is a large field for its deceit and subtlety to lurk in:—"Though it is an evil indeed to be relinquished, and the soul is to be made watchful against it, yet it is not of that magnitude and degree as we may see in the lives of others, even saints of God, much less such as some saints of old have fallen into." By these and the like pretences, I say, it seeks to evade and keep its abode in the soul when pursued to destruction. And how little a portion of its deceitfulness is it that we have declared!

CHAPTER XIII.

Several ways whereby the bringing forth of conceived sin is obstructed.

BEFORE we proceed to the remaining evidences of the power and efficacy of the law of sin, we shall take occasion from what hath been delivered to divert unto one consideration that offers itself from that Scripture which was made the bottom and foundation of our discourse of the general deceitfulness of sin, namely, James i. 14. The apostle tells us that "lust conceiving bringeth forth sin;" seeming to intimate, that look what sin is conceived, that also is brought forth. Now, placing the conception of sin, as we have done, in the consent of the will unto it, and reckoning, as we ought, the bringing forth of sin to consist of its actual commission, we know that these do not necessarily follow one another. There is a world of sin conceived in the womb of the wills and hearts of men that is never brought forth. Our present business, then, shall be to inquire whence that comes to pass. I answer, then,—

Digitized by Google

1. That this is not so, is no thanks unto sin nor the law of it. What it conceives, it would bring forth; and that it doth not is for the most part but a small abatement of its guilt. A *determinate will* of actual sinning is actual sin. There is nothing wanting on sin's part that every conceived sin is not actually accomplished. The obstacle and prevention lies on another hand.

2. There are two things that are necessary in the creature that hath conceived sin, for the bringing of it forth;—first, *Power;* secondly, *Continuance in the will of sinning* until it be perpetrated and committed. Where these two are, actual sin will unavoidably ensue. It is evident, therefore, that that which hinders conceived sin from being brought forth must affect either the power or the will of the sinner. This must be from God. And he hath two ways of doing it: (1.) By his *providence,* whereby he obstructs the power of sinning. (2.) By his *grace,* whereby he diverts or changes the will of sinning. I do not mention these ways of God's dispensations thus distinctly, as though the one of them were always without the other; for there is much of grace in providential administrations, and much of the wisdom of providence seen in the dispensations of grace. But I place them in this distinction, because they appear most eminent therein;—providence, in outward acts respecting the power of the creature; grace, common or special, in internal efficacy respecting his will. And we shall begin with the first:—

(1.) When sin is conceived, the Lord obstructs its production by his providence, in taking away or cutting short that *power* which is absolutely necessary for its bringing forth or accomplishment; as,—

[1.] *Life* is the foundation of all power, the principle of operation; when that ceaseth, all power ceaseth with it. Even God himself, to evince the everlasting stability of his own power, gives himself the title of "The living God." Now, he frequently obviates the power of executing sin actually by cutting short and taking away the lives of them that have conceived it. Thus he dealt with the army of Sennacherib, when, according as he had purposed, so he threatened that "the LORD should not deliver Jerusalem out of his hand," 2 Kings xviii. 35. God threatens to cut short his power, that he should not execute his intendment, chap. xix. 28; which he performs accordingly, by taking away the lives of his soldiers, verse 35, without whom it was impossible that his conceived sin should be brought forth. This providential dispensation in the obstruction of conceived sin, Moses excellently sets forth in the case of Pharaoh: Exod. xv. 9, 10, "The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them. Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered

Digitized by Google

them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters." Sin's conception is fully expressed, and as full a prevention is annexed unto it. In like manner he dealt with the companies of fifties and their captains, who came to apprehend Elijah, 2 Kings i. 9–12. Fire came down from heaven and consumed them, when they were ready to have taken him. And sundry other instances of the like nature might be recorded. That which is of universal concernment we have in that great providential alteration which put a period to the lives of men. Men living hundreds of years had a long season to bring forth the sins they had conceived; thereupon the earth was filled with violence, injustice, and rapine, and "all flesh corrupted his way," Gen. vi. 12, 13. To prevent the like inundation of sin, God shortens the course of the pilgrimage of men in the earth, and reduces their lives to a much shorter measure. Besides this general law, God daily thus cuts off persons who had conceived much mischief and violence in their hearts, and prevents the execution of it: "Blood-thirsty and deceitful men do not live out half their days." They have yet much work to do, might they have but space given them to execute the bloody and sinful purposes of their minds. The psalmist tells us, Ps. cxlvi. 4, "In the day that the breath of man goeth forth, his thoughts perish:" he had many contrivances about sin, but now they are all cut off. So also, Eccles. viii. 12, 13, "Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: but it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God." How long soever a wicked man lives, yet he dies *judicially*, and shall not abide to do the evil he had conceived.

But now, seeing we have granted that even believers themselves may conceive sin through the power and the deceitfulness of it, it may be inquired whether God ever thus obviates its production and accomplishment in them, by cutting off and taking away their lives, so as that they shall not be able to perform it. I answer,—

1*st.* That God doth not *judicially* cut off and take away the life of any of his for this end and purpose, that he may thereby prevent the execution or bringing forth of any particular sin that he had conceived, and which, without that taking away, he would have perpetrated; for,—

(1*st.*) This is directly contrary to the very declared end of *the patience of God* towards them, 2 Pet. iii. 9. This is the very end of the long-suffering of God towards believers, that before they depart hence they may come to the sense, acknowledgment, and repentance of every known sin. This is the constant and unchangeable rule of God's patience in the covenant of grace; which is so far from being

Digitized by Google

in them an encouragement unto sin, that it is a motive to universal watchfulness against it,—of the same nature with all gospel grace, and of mercy in the blood of Christ. Now, this dispensation whereof we speak would lie in a direct contradiction unto it.

(2*dly.*) This also flows from the former, that whereas conceived sin contains the whole nature of it, as our Saviour at large declares, Matt. v.; and to be cut off under the guilt of it, to prevent its farther progress, argues a continuance in the purpose of it without repentance, it cannot be but they must perish for ever who are so *judicially* cut off. But God deals not so with his; he casts not off the people whom he did foreknow. And thence David prays for the patience of God before mentioned, that it might not be so with him: Ps. xxxix. 13, "O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more." But yet,—

2*dly.* There are some cases wherein God may and doth take away *the lives of his own*, to prevent the guilt that otherwise they would be involved in; as,—

(1*st.*) In the coming of some great temptation and trial upon the world. God knowing that such and such of his would not be able to withstand it and hold out against it, but would dishonour him and defile themselves, he may, and doubtless often doth, take them out of the world, to take them out of the way of it: Isa. lvii. 1, "The righteous is taken away from the evil to come;" not only the evil of punishment and judgment, but the evil of temptations and trials, which oftentimes proves much the worse of the two. Thus a captain in war will call off a soldier from his watch and guard, when he knows that he is not able, through some infirmity, to bear the stress and force of the enemy that is coming upon him.

(2*dly.*) In case of their engagement into any way not acceptable to him, through ignorance or not knowing of his mind and will. This seems to have been the case of Josiah. And, doubtless, the Lord doth oftentimes thus proceed with his. When any of his own are engaged in ways that please him not, through the darkness and ignorance of their minds, that they may not proceed to farther evil or mischief, he calls them off from their station and employment and takes them to himself, where they shall err and mistake no more. But, in ordinary cases, God hath other ways of diverting his own from sin than by killing of them, as we shall see afterward.

[2.] God providentially hinders the bringing forth of conceived sin, by taking away and *cutting short the power* of them that had conceived it, so that, though their lives continue, they shall not have that power without which it is impossible for them to execute what they had intended, or to bring forth what they had conceived. Hereof also we have sundry instances. This was the case with the builders

Digitized by Google

of Babel, Gen. xi. Whatever it were in particular that they aimed at, it was in the pursuit of a design of apostasy from God. One thing requisite to the accomplishing of what they aimed at was the oneness of their language; so God says, verse 6, "They have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, that they have imagined to do." In an ordinary way they will accomplish their wicked design. What course doth God now take to obviate their conceived sin? Doth he bring a flood upon them to destroy them, as in the old world some time before? Doth he send his angel to cut them off, like the army of Sennacherib afterward? Doth he by any means take away their lives? No; their lives are continued, but he "confounds their language," so that they cannot go on with their work, verse 7,—takes away that wherein their power consisted. In like manner did he proceed with the Sodomites, Gen. xix. 11. They were engaged in, and set upon the pursuit of, their filthy lusts. God smites them with blindness, so that they could not find the door, where they thought to have used violence for the compassing of their ends. Their lives were continued, and their will of sinning; but their power is cut short and abridged. His dealing with Jeroboam, 1 Kings xiii. 4, was of the same nature. He stretched out his hand to lay hold of the prophet, and it withered and became useless. And this is an eminent way of the effectual acting of God's providence in the world, for the stopping of that inundation of sin which would overflow all the earth were every womb of it opened. He cuts men short of their moral power, whereby they should effect it. Many a wretch that hath conceived mischief against the church of God hath by this means been divested of his power, whereby he thought to accomplish it. Some have their bodies smitten with diseases, that they can no more serve their lusts, nor accompany them in the perpetrating of folly; some are deprived of the instruments whereby they would work. There hath been, for many days, sin enough conceived to root out the generation of the righteous from the face of the earth, had men strength and ability to their will, did not God cut off and shorten their power and the days of their prevalency. Ps. lxiv. 6, "They search out iniquities; they accomplish a diligent search: both the inward thought of every one of them, and the heart, is deep." All things are in a readiness; the design is well laid, their counsels are deep and secret; what now shall hinder them from doing whatever they have imagined to do? Verses 7, 8, "But God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded. So they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves." God meets with them, brings them down, that they shall not be able to accomplish their design. And this way of God's preventing sin seems to be, at least ordinarily, peculiar to the men of the world;

Digitized by Google

God deals thus with them every day, and leaves them to pine away in their sins. They go all their days big with the iniquity they have conceived, and are greatly burdened that they cannot be delivered of it. The prophet tells us that "they practise iniquity that they had conceived, because it is in the power of their hand," Micah ii. 1. If they have power for it, they will accomplish it: Ezek. xxii. 6, "To their power they shed blood." This is the measure of their sinning, even their power. They do, many of them, no more evil, they commit no more sin, than they can. Their whole restraint lies in being cut short in power, in one kind or another. Their bodies will not serve them for their contrived uncleannesses, nor their hands for their revenge and rapine, nor their instruments for persecution; but they go burdened with conceived sin, and are disquieted and tortured by it all their days. And hence they become in themselves, as well as unto others, "a troubled sea, that cannot rest," Isa. lvii. 20.

It may be, also, in some cases, under some violent temptations, or in mistakes, God may thus obviate the accomplishment of conceived sin in his own. And there seems to be an instance of it in his dealing with Jehoshaphat, who had designed, against the mind of God, to join in affinity with Ahab, and to send his ships with him to Tarshish; but God breaks his ships by a wind, that he could not accomplish what he had designed. But in God's dealing with his in this way, there is a difference from the same dispensation towards others; for,—

1*st.* It is so only in cases of *extraordinary temptation.* When, through the violence of temptation and craft of Satan, they are hurried from under the conduct of the law of grace, God one way or other takes away their power, or may do so, that they shall not be able to execute what they had designed. But this is an ordinary way of dealing with wicked men. This hook of God is upon them in the whole course of their lives; and they struggle with it, being "as a wild bull in a net," Isa. li. 20. God's net is upon them, and they are filled with fury that they cannot do all the wickedness that they would.

2*dly.* God doth it not to leave them to wrestle with sin, and to attempt other ways of its accomplishment, upon the failure of that which they were engaged in; but by their disappointment awakens them to think of their condition and what they are doing, and so *consumes sin in the womb* by the ways that shall afterward be insisted on. Some men's deprivation of power for the committing of conceived, contrived sin hath been sanctified to the changing of their hearts from all dalliances with that or other sins.

[3.] God *providentially* hinders the bringing forth of conceived sin by opposing *an external hindering power* unto sinners. He

Digitized by Google

leaves them their lives, and leaves them power to do what they intend; only he raiseth up an opposite power to coerce, forbid, and restrain them. An instance hereof we have, 1 Sam. xiv. 45. Saul had sworn that Jonathan should be put to death; and, as far as appears, went on resolutely to have slain him. God stirs up the spirit of the people; they oppose themselves to the wrath and fury of Saul, and Jonathan is delivered. So also, 2 Chron. xxvi. 16–20, when king Uzziah would have in his own person offered incense, contrary to the law, eighty men of the priests resisted him, and drove him out of the temple. And to this head are to be referred all the assistances which God stirreth up for deliverance of his people against the fury of persecutors. He raiseth up saviours or deliverers on mount Zion, "to judge the mount of Edom." So, Rev. xii. 16, the dragon, and those acting under him, spirited by him, were in a furious endeavour for the destruction of the church; God stirs up the earth to her assistance, even men of the world not engaged with others in the design of Satan; and by their opposition hinders them from the execution of their designed rage. Of this nature seems to be that dealing of God with his own people, Hos. ii. 6, 7. They were in the pursuit of their iniquities, following after their lovers; God leaves them for a while to act in the folly of their spirits; but he sets a hedge and a wall before them, that they shall not be able to fulfil their designs and lusts.

[4.] God obviates the accomplishment of conceived sin by removing or taking away the *objects* on whom, or about whom, the sin conceived was to be committed. Acts xii. 1–11 yields us a signal instance of this issue of providence. When the day was coming wherein Herod thought to have slain Peter, who was shut up in prison, God sends and takes him away from their rage and lying in wait. So also was our Saviour himself taken away from the murderous rage of the Jews before his hour was come, John viii. 59, x. 39. Both primitive and latter times are full of stories to this purpose. Prison doors have been opened, and poor creatures appointed to die have been frequently rescued from the jaws of death. In the world itself, amongst the men thereof, adulterers and adulteresses, the sin of the one is often hindered and stifled by the taking away of the other. So wings were given to the woman to carry her into the wilderness, and to disappoint the world in the execution of their rage, Rev. xii. 14.

[5.] God doth this by some eminent *diversions* of the thoughts of men who had conceived sin. Gen. xxxvii. 24, the brethren of Joseph cast him into a pit, with an intent to famish him there. Whilst they were, as it seems, pleasing themselves with what they had done, God orders a company of merchants to come by, and diverts their

Digitized by Google

thoughts with that new object from the killing to the selling of their brother, verses 25–27; and how far therein they were subservient to the infinitely wise counsel of God we know. Thus, also, when Saul was in the pursuit of David, and was even ready to prevail against him to his destruction, God stirs up the Philistines to invade the land, which both diverted his thoughts and drew the course of his actings another way, 1 Sam. xxiii. 27.

And these are some of the ways whereby God is pleased to hinder the bringing forth of conceived sin, by opposing himself and his providence to the power of the sinning creature. And we may a little, in our passage, take a brief view of the great advantages to faith and the church of God which may be found in this matter; as,—

1*st*. This may give us a little insight into the ever-to-be-adored providence of God, by these and the like ways in great variety obstructing the breaking forth of sin in the world. It is he who makes those dams, and shuts up those flood-gates of corrupted nature, that it shall not break forth in a deluge of filthy abominations, to overwhelm the creation with confusion and disorder. As it was of old, so it is at this day: "Every thought and imagination of the heart of man is evil, and that continually." That all the earth is not in all places filled with violence, as it was of old, is merely from the mighty hand of God working effectually for the obstructing of sin. From hence alone it is that the highways, streets, and fields are not all filled with violence, blood, rapine, uncleanness, and every villany that the heart of man can conceive. Oh, the infinite beauty of divine wisdom and providence in the government of the world! for the conservation of it asks daily no less power and wisdom than the first making of it did require.

2*dly*. If we will look to our own concernments, they will in a special manner enforce us to adore the wisdom and efficacy of the providence of God in stopping the progress of conceived sin. That we are at peace in our houses, at rest in our beds, that we have any quiet in our enjoyments, is from hence alone. Whose person would not be defiled or destroyed,—whose habitation would not be ruined,—whose blood almost would not be shed,—if wicked men had power to perpetrate all their conceived sin? It may be the ruin of some of us hath been conceived a thousand times. We are beholding to this providence of obstructing sin for our lives, our families, our estates, our liberties, for whatsoever is or may be dear unto us; for may we not say sometimes, with the psalmist, Ps. lvii. 4, "My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword?" And how is the deliverance of men contrived from such persons? Ps. lviii. 6, "God breaks their teeth in their mouths, even the great

Digitized by Google

teeth of the young lions." He keeps this fire from burning, or quencheth it when it is ready to break out into a flame. He breaks their spears and arrows, so that sometimes we are not so much as wounded by them. Some he cuts off and destroys; some he cuts short in their power; some he deprives of the instruments whereby alone they can work; some he prevents of their desired opportunities, or diverts by other objects for their lusts; and oftentimes causeth them to spend them among themselves, one upon another. We may say, therefore, with the psalmist, Ps. civ. 24, "O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches;" and with the prophet, Hos. xiv. 9, "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? all the ways of the LORD are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein."

3*dly*. If these and the like are the ways whereby God obviates the bringing forth of conceived sin in wicked men, we may learn hence how miserable their condition is, and in what perpetual torment, for the most part, they spend their days. They "are like a troubled sea," saith the Lord, "that cannot rest." As they endeavour that others may have no peace, so it is certain that themselves have not any; the principle of sin is not impaired nor weakened in them, the will of sinning is not taken away. They have a womb of sin, that is able to conceive monsters every moment. Yea, for the most part, they are forging and framing folly all the day long. One lust or other they are contriving how to satisfy. They are either devouring by malice and revenge, or vitiating by uncleanness, or trampling on by ambition, or swallowing down by covetousness, all that stand before them. Many of their follies and mischiefs they bring to the very birth, and are in pain to be delivered; but God every day fills them with disappointment, and shuts up the womb of sin. Some are filled with hatred of God's people all their days, and never once have an opportunity to exercise it. So David describes them, Ps. lix. 6, "They return at evening: they make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city." They go up and down, and "belch out with their mouth: swords are in their lips," verse 7, and yet are not able to accomplish their designs. What tortures do such poor creatures live in! Envy, malice, wrath, revenge, devour their hearts by not getting vent. And when God hath exercised the other acts of his wise providence in cutting short their power, or opposing a greater power to them, when nothing else will do, he cuts them off in their sins, and to the grave they go, full of purposes of iniquity. Others are no less hurried and diverted by the power of other lusts which they are not able to satisfy. This is the sore travail they are exercised with all their days:—If they accomplish their designs they are

Digitized by Google

more wicked and hellish than before; and if they do not, they are filled with vexation and discontentment. This is the portion of them who know not the Lord nor the power of his grace. Envy not their condition. Notwithstanding their outward, glittering show, their hearts are full of anxiety, trouble, and sorrow.

4thly. Do we see sometimes the flood-gates of men's lusts and rage set open against the church and interest of it, and doth prevalency attend them, and power is for a season on their side?—let not the saints of God despond. He hath unspeakably various and effectual ways for the stifling of their conceptions, to give them dry breasts and a miscarrying womb. He can stop their fury when he pleaseth. "Surely," saith the psalmist, "the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain," Ps. lxxvi. 10. When so much of their wrath is let out as shall exalt his praise, he can, when he pleaseth, set up a power greater than the combined strength of all sinning creatures, and restrain the remainder of the wrath that they had conceived. "He shall cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth," verse 12. Some he will cut off and destroy, some he will terrify and affright, and prevent the rage of all. He can knock them on the head, or break out their teeth, or chain up their wrath; and who can oppose him?

5thly. Those who have received benefit by any of the ways mentioned may know to whom they owe their preservation, and not look on it as a common thing. When you have conceived sin, hath God weakened your power for sin, or denied you opportunity, or taken away the object of your lusts, or diverted your thoughts by new providences?—know assuredly that you have received mercy thereby. Though God deal not these providences always in a subserviency to the covenant of grace, yet there is always mercy in them, always a call in them to consider the author of them. Had not God thus dealt with you, it may be this day you had been a terror to yourselves, a shame to your relations, and under the punishment due to some notorious sins which you had conceived. Besides, there is commonly an *additional guilt* in sin brought forth, above what is in the mere conception of it. It may be others would have been ruined by it here, or drawn into a partnership in sin by it, and so have been eternally ruined by it, all which are prevented by these providences; and eternity will witness that there is a singularity of mercy in them. Do not look, then, on any such things as common accidents; the hand of God is in them all, and that a merciful hand if not despised. If it be, yet God doth good to others by it: the world is the better; and you are not so wicked as you would be.

6thly. We may also see hence the great use of *magistracy* in the world, that great appointment of God. Amongst other things, it is

Digitized by Google

peculiarly subservient to this holy providence, in obstructing the bringing forth of conceived sin,—namely, by the terror of him that bears the sword. God fixes that on the hearts of evil men, which he expresseth, Rom. xiii. 4, "If thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath on them that do evil." God fixes this on the hearts of men, and by the dread and terror of it closeth the womb of sin, that it shall not bring forth. When there was no king in Israel, none to put to rebuke, and none of whom evil men were afraid, there was woful work and havoc amongst the children of men made in the world, as we may see in the last chapters of the book of Judges. The greatest mercies and blessings that in this world we are made partakers of, next to them of the gospel and covenant of grace, come to us through this channel and conduit. And, indeed, this whereof we have been speaking is the proper work of magistracy,—namely, to be subservient to the providence of God in obstructing the bringing forth of conceived sin.

These, then, are some of the ways whereby God providentially prevents the bringing forth of sin, by opposing obstacles to the power of the sinner. And [yet] by them sin is not consumed, but shut up in the womb. Men are not burdened for it, but with it; not laden in their hearts and consciences with its guilt, but perplexed with its power, which they are not able to exert and satisfy.

(2.) The way, that yet remains for consideration, whereby God obviates the production of conceived sin is his working on the will of the sinner, so making sin to consume away in the womb.

There are two ways in general whereby God thus prevents the bringing forth of conceived sin by working on the will of the sinner; and they are,—[1.] By *restraining grace;* [2.] By *renewing grace.* He doth it sometimes the one way, sometimes the other. The first of these is common to regenerate and unregenerate persons, the latter peculiar to believers; and God doth it variously as to particulars by them both. We shall begin with the first of them:—

[1.] God doth this, in the way of restraining grace, by *some arrow of particular conviction*, fixed in the heart and conscience of the sinner, in reference unto the particular sin which he had conceived. This staggers and changes the mind as to the particular intended, causeth the hands to hang down and the weapons of lust to fall out of them. Hereby *conceived* sin proves abortive. How God doth this work,—by what immediate touches, strokes, blows, rebukes of his Spirit,—by what reasonings, arguments, and commotions of men's own consciences,—is not for us thoroughly to find out It is done, as was said, in unspeakable variety, and the works of God are past finding out. But as to what light may be given unto it from Scripture

Digitized by Google

instances, after we have manifested the general way of God's procedure, it shall be insisted on.

Thus, then, God dealt in the case of Esau and Jacob. Esau had long conceived his brother's death; he comforted himself with the thoughts of it, and resolutions about it, Gen. xxvii. 41, as is the manner of profligate sinners. Upon his first opportunity he comes forth to execute his intended rage, and Jacob concludes that he would "smite the mother with the children," Gen. xxxii. 11. An opportunity is presented unto this wicked and profane person to bring forth that sin that had lain in his heart now twenty years; he hath full power in his hand to perform his purpose. In the midst of this posture of things, God comes in upon his heart with some secret and effectual working of his Spirit and power, changeth him from his purpose, causeth his conceived sin to melt away, that he falls upon the neck of him with embraces whom he thought to have slain.

Of the same nature, though the way of it was peculiar, was his dealing with Laban the Syrian, in reference to the same Jacob, Gen. xxxi. 24. By a dream, a vision in the night, God hinders him from so much as speaking roughly to him. It was with him as in Micah ii. 1:—he had devised evil on his bed; and when he thought to have practised it in the morning, God interposed in a dream, and hides sin from him, as he speaks, Job xxxiii. 15–17. To the same purpose is that of the psalmist concerning the people of God: Ps. cvi. 46, "He made them to be pitied of all those that carried them captives." Men usually deal in rigour with those whom they have taken captive in war. It was the way of old to rule captives with force and cruelty. Here God turns and changes their hearts, not in general unto himself, but to this particular of respect to his people. And this way in general doth God every day prevent the bringing forth of a world of sin. He sharpens arrows of conviction upon the spirits of men as to the particular that they are engaged in. Their hearts are not changed as to sin, but their minds are altered as to this or that sin. They break, it may be, the vessel they had fashioned, and go to work upon some other. Now, that we may a little see into the ways whereby God doth accomplish this work, we must premise the ensuing considerations:—

1*st*. That the general *medium* wherein the matter of restraining grace doth consist, whereby God thus prevents the bringing forth of sin, doth lie in certain arguments and reasonings presented to the mind of the sinner, whereby he is induced to desert his purpose, to change and alter his mind, as to the sin he had conceived. Reasons against it are presented unto him, which prevail upon him to relinquish his design and give over his purpose. This is the general way

Digitized by Google

of the working of restraining grace,—it is by arguments and reasonings rising up against the perpetration of conceived sin.

2*dly*. That no *arguments* or reasonings, as such, *materially* considered, are sufficient to stop or hinder any purpose of sinning, or to cause conceived sin to prove abortive, if the sinner have power and opportunity to bring it forth. They are not in themselves, and on their own account, restraining grace; for if they were, the administration and communication of grace, as grace, were left unto every man who is able to give advice against sin. Nothing is nor can be called grace, though common, and such as may perish, but with respect unto its peculiar relation to God. God, by the power of his Spirit, making arguments and reasons effectual and prevailing, turns that to be grace (I mean of this kind) which in itself and in its own nature was bare reason. And that efficacy of the Spirit which the Lord puts forth in these persuasions and motives is that which we call restraining grace. These things being premised, we shall now consider some of the arguments which we find that he hath made use of to this end and purpose:—

(1*st*.) God stops many men in their ways, upon the conception of sin, by an argument taken from the *difficulty*, if not impossibility, of doing that they aim at. They have a mind unto it, but God sets a hedge and a wall before them, that they shall judge it to be so hard and difficult to accomplish what they intend, that it is better for them to let it alone and give over. Thus Herod would have put John Baptist to death upon the first provocation, but he feared the multitude, because they accounted him as a prophet, Matt. xiv. 5. He had conceived his murder, and was free for the execution of it. God raised this consideration in his heart, "If I kill him, the people will tumultuate; he hath a great party amongst them, and sedition will arise that may cost me my life or kingdom." He feared the multitude, and durst not execute the wickedness he had conceived, because of the difficulty he foresaw he should be entangled withal. And God made the argument effectual for the season; for otherwise we know that men will venture the utmost hazards for the satisfaction of their lusts, as he also did afterward. The Pharisees were in the very same state and condition. Matt. xxi. 26, they would fain have decried the ministry of John, but durst not for fear of the people; and, verse 46 of the same chapter, by the same argument were they deterred from killing our Saviour, who had highly provoked them by a parable setting out their deserved and approaching destruction. They durst not do it for fear of a tumult among the people, seeing they looked on him as a prophet. Thus God overawes the hearts of innumerable persons in the world every day, and causeth them to desist from attempting to bring forth the sins which they had conceived. Difficul-

Digitized by Google

ties they shall be sure to meet withal, yea, it is likely, if they should attempt it, it would prove impossible for them to accomplish. We owe much of our quiet in this world unto the efficacy given to this consideration in the hearts of men by the Holy Ghost; adulteries, rapines, murders, are obviated and stifled by it. Men would engage into them daily, but that they judge it impossible for them to fulfil what they aim at.

(2*dly.*) God doth it by an argument taken "ab incommodo,"—from the *inconveniences*, evils, and troubles that will befall men in the pursuit of sin. If they follow it, this or that inconvenience will ensue,—this trouble, this evil, temporal or eternal. And this argument, as managed by the Spirit of God, is the great engine in his hand whereby he casts up banks and gives bounds to the lusts of men, that they break not out to the confusion of all that order and beauty which yet remains in the works of his hands. Paul gives us the general import of this argument, Rom. ii. 14, 15, "For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another." If any men in the world may be thought to be given up to pursue and fulfil all the sins that their lusts can conceive, it is those that have not the law, to whom the written law of God doth not denounce the evil that attends it. "But though they have it not," saith the apostle, "they show forth the work of it; they do many things which it requireth, and forbear or abstain from many things that it forbiddeth, and so show forth its work and efficacy." But whence is it that they so do? Why, *their thoughts accuse or excuse them.* It is from the consideration and arguings that they have within themselves about sin and its consequents, which prevail upon them to abstain from many things that their hearts would carry them out unto; for conscience is a man's prejudging of himself with respect unto the future judgment of God. Thus Felix was staggered in his pursuit of sin, when he trembled at Paul's preaching of righteousness and judgment to come, Acts xxiv. 25. So Job tells us that the consideration of punishment from God hath a strong influence on the minds of men to keep them from sin, chap. xxxi. 1–3. How the Lord makes use of that consideration, even towards his own, when they have broken the cords of his love and cast off the rule of his grace for a season, I have before declared.

(3*dly.*) God doth this same work by making effectual an argument "ab inutili,"—from the *unprofitableness* of the thing that men are engaged in. By this were the brethren of Joseph stayed from slaying him: Gen. xxxvii. 26, 27, "What profit is it," say they, "if

Digitized by Google

we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?"—"We shall get nothing by it; it will bring in no advantage or satisfaction unto us." And the heads of this way of God's obstructing conceived sin, or the springs of these kinds of arguments, are so many and various that it is impossible to insist particularly upon them. There is nothing present or to come, nothing belonging to this life or another, nothing desirable or undesirable, nothing good or evil, but, at one time or another, an argument may be taken from it for the obstructing of sin.

(*4thly.*) God accomplisheth this work by arguments taken "ab honesto,"—from what is *good* and *honest*, what is comely, praiseworthy, and acceptable unto himself. This is the great road wherein he walks with the saints under their temptations, or in their conceptions of sin. He recovers effectually upon their minds a consideration of all those springs and motives to obedience which are discovered and proposed in the gospel, some at one time, some at another. He minds them of his own love, mercy, and kindness,—his *eternal* love, with the fruits of it, whereof themselves have been made partakers; he minds them of the *blood of his Son*, his cross, sufferings, tremendous undertaking in the work of mediation, and the concernment of his heart, love, honour, name, in their obedience; minds them of *the love of the Spirit*, with all his consolations, which they have been made partakers of, and privileges wherewith by him they have been intrusted; minds them of the *gospel*, the glory and beauty of it, as it is revealed unto their souls; minds them of the excellency and comeliness of *obedience*,—of their performance of that duty they owe to God,—of that peace, quietness, and serenity of mind that they have enjoyed therein. On the other side, he minds them of being *a provocation by sin* unto the eyes of his glory, saying in their hearts, "Do not that abominable thing which my soul hateth;" minds them of their *wounding* the Lord Jesus Christ, and putting him to shame, —of their *grieving* the Holy Spirit, whereby they are sealed to the day of redemption,—of their *defiling* his dwelling-place; minds them of the reproach, dishonour, scandal, which they bring on the gospel and the profession thereof; minds them of the *terrors*, darkness, wounds, want of peace, that they may bring upon their own souls. From these and the like considerations doth God put a stop to the law of sin in the heart, that it shall not go on to bring forth the evil which it hath conceived. I could give instances in argument of all these several kinds recorded in the Scripture, but it would be too long a work for us, who are now engaged in a design of another nature; but one or two examples may be mentioned. Joseph resists his first temptation on one of these accounts: Gen. xxxix. 9, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" The evil of sinning against God, his God, that consideration alone detains him

Digitized by Google

from the least inclination to his temptation. "It is sin against God, to whom I owe all obedience, the God of my life and of all my mercies. I will not do it." The argument wherewith Abigail prevailed on David, 1 Sam. xxv. 31, to withhold him from self-revenge and murder, was of the same nature; and he acknowledgeth that it was from the Lord, verse 32. I shall add no more; for all the Scripture motives which we have to duty, made effectual by grace, are instances of this way of God's procedure.

Sometimes, I confess, God secretly works the hearts of men by his own finger, without the use and means of such arguments as those insisted on, to stop the progress of sin. So he tells Abimelech, Gen. xx. 6, "I have withheld thee from sinning against me." Now, this could not be done by any of the arguments which we have insisted on, because Abimelech knew not that the thing he intended was sin; and therefore he pleads, that in the "integrity of his heart and innocency of his hands" he did it, verse 5. God turned about his will and thoughts, that he should not accomplish his intention; but by what ways or means is not revealed. Nor is it evident what course he took in the change of Esau's heart, when he came out against his brother to destroy him, Gen. xxxiii. 4. Whether he stirred up in him a fresh spring of natural affection, or caused him to consider what grief by this means he should bring to his aged father, who loved him so tenderly; or whether, being now grown great and wealthy, he more and more despised the matter of difference between him and his brother, and so utterly slighted it, is not known. It may be God did it by an immediate, powerful act of his Spirit upon his heart, without any actual intervening of these or any of the like considerations. Now, though the things mentioned are in themselves at other times feeble and weak, yet when they are managed by the Spirit of God to such an end and purpose, they certainly become effectual, and are the matter of his preventing grace.

[2.] God prevents the bringing forth of conceived sin by *real spiritual saving grace*, and that either in the first conversion of sinners or in the following supplies of it:—

1*st*. This is one part of the mystery of his grace and love. He meets men sometimes, in their highest resolutions for sin, with the highest efficacy of his grace. Hereby he manifests the *power of his own grace*, and gives the soul a farther experience of the law of sin, when it takes such a farewell of it as to be changed in the midst of its resolutions to serve the lusts thereof. By this he melts down the lusts of men, causeth them to wither at the root, that they shall no more strive to bring forth what they have conceived, but be filled with shame and sorrow at their conception. An example and instance of this proceeding of God, for the use and instruction of all genera-

Digitized by Google

tions, we have in Paul. His heart was full of wickedness, blasphemy, and persecution; his conception of them was come unto rage and madness, and a full purpose of exercising them all to the utmost: so the story relates it, Acts ix.; so himself declares the state to have been with him, Acts xxvi. 9–12, 1 Tim. i. 13. In the midst of all this violent pursuit of sin, a voice from heaven shuts up the womb and dries the breasts of it, and he cries, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Acts ix. 6. The same person seems to intimate that this is the way of God's procedure with others, even to meet them with his converting grace in the height of their sin and folly, 1 Tim. i. 16: for he himself, he says, was a pattern of God's dealing with others; as he dealt with him, so also would he do with some such-like sinners: "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." And we have not a few examples of it in our own days. Sundry persons on set purpose going to this or that place to deride and scoff at the dispensation of the word, have been met withal in the very place wherein they designed to serve their lusts and Satan, and have been cast down at the foot of God. This way of God's dealing with sinners is at large set forth, Job xxxiii. 15–18. Dionysius the Areopagite is another instance of this work of God's grace and love. Paul is dragged either *by* him or *before* him, to plead for his life, as "a setter forth of strange gods," which at Athens was death by the law. In the midst of this frame of spirit God meets with him by converting grace, sin withers in the womb, and he cleaves to Paul and his doctrine, Acts xvii. 18–34. The like dispensation towards Israel we have, Hos. xi. 7–10. But there is no need to insist on more instances of this observation. God is pleased to leave no generation unconvinced of this truth, if they do but attend to their own experiences and the examples of this work of his mercy amongst them. Every day, one or other is taken in the fulness of the purpose of his heart to go on in sin, in this or that sin, and is stopped in his course by the power of converting grace.

2*dly*. God doth it by the same grace in the *renewed communications of it;* that is, by *special assisting grace.* This is the common way of his dealing with believers in this case. That they also, through the deceitfulness of sin, may be carried on to the conceiving of this or that sin, was before declared. God puts a stop to their progress, or rather to the prevalency of the law of sin in them, and that by giving in unto them special assistances needful for their preservation and deliverance. As David says of himself, Ps. lxxiii. 2, "His feet were almost gone, his steps had well-nigh slipped,"—he was at the very brink of unbelieving, despairing thoughts and conclusions about God's providence in the government of the world,

Digitized by Google

from whence he was recovered, as he afterwards declares,—so is it with many a believer; he is oftentimes at the very brink, at the very door of some folly or iniquity, when God puts in by the efficacy of actually assisting grace, and recovers them to an obediential frame of heart again. And this is a peculiar work of Christ, wherein he manifests and exerts his faithfulness towards his own: Heb. ii. 18, "He is able to succour them that are tempted." It is not an absolute power, but a power clothed with mercy, that is intended,—such a power as is put forth from a sense of the suffering of poor believers under their temptations. And how doth he exercise this merciful ability towards us? Chap. iv. 16, he gives forth, and we find in him, "grace to help in time of need,"—seasonable help and assistance for our deliverance, when we are ready to be overpowered by sin and temptation. When lust hath conceived, and is ready to bring forth,—when the soul lies at the brink of some iniquity,—he gives in seasonable help, relief, deliverance, and safety. Here lies a great part of the care and faithfulness of Christ towards his poor saints. He will not suffer them to be worried with the power of sin, nor to be carried out unto ways that shall dishonour the gospel, or fill them with shame and reproach, and so render them useless in the world; but he steps in with the saving relief and assistance of his grace, stops the course of sin, and makes them in himself more than conquerors. And this assistance lies under the promise, 1 Cor. x. 13, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Temptation shall try us,—it is for our good; many holy ends doth the Lord compass and bring about by it. But when we are tried to the utmost of our ability, so that one assault more would overbear us, a way of escape is provided. And as this may be done several ways, as I have elsewhere declared, so this we are now upon is one of the most eminent,—namely, by supplies of grace to enable the soul to bear up, resist, and conquer. And when once God begins to deal in this way of love with a soul, he will not cease to add one supply after another, until the whole work of his grace and faithfulness be accomplished; an example hereof we have, Isa. lvii. 17, 18. Poor sinners there are so far captivated to the power of their lusts that the first and second dealings of God with them are not effectual for their delivery, but he will not give them over; he is in the pursuit of a design of love towards them, and so ceaseth not until they are recovered. These are the general heads of the second way whereby God hinders the bringing forth of conceived sin,—namely, by working on the will of the sinner. He doth it either by common convictions or special grace, so that of their own

Digitized by Google

accord they shall let go the purpose and will of sinning that they are risen up unto. And this is no mean way of his providing for his own glory and the honour of his gospel in the world, whose professors would stain the whole beauty of it were they left to themselves to bring forth all the evil that is conceived in their hearts.

3*dly*. Besides these *general* ways, there is one yet more special, that at once worketh both upon *the power and will* of the sinner, and this is the way of afflictions, concerning which one word shall close this discourse. Afflictions, I say, work by both these ways in reference unto conceived sin. They work providentially on the power of the creature. When a man hath conceived a sin, and is in full purpose of the pursuit of it, God oftentimes sends a sickness and abates his strength, or a loss cuts him short in his plenty, and so takes him off from the pursuit of his lusts, though it may be his heart is not weaned from them. His power is weakened, and he cannot do the evil he would. In this sense it belongs to the first way of God's obviating the production of sin. Great afflictions work sometimes not from their own nature, immediately and directly, but from the gracious purpose and intendment of him that sends them. He insinuates into the dispensation of them that of grace and power, of love and kindness, which shall effectually take off the heart and mind from sin: Ps. cxix. 67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." And in this way, because of the predominancy of renewing and assisting grace, they belong unto the latter means, of preventing sin.

And these are some of the ways whereby it pleaseth God to put a stop to the progress of sin, both in believers and unbelievers, which at present we shall instance in; and if we would endeavour farther to search out his ways unto perfection, yet we must still conclude that it is but a little portion which we know of him.

CHAPTER XIV.

The power of sin farther demonstrated by the effects it hath had in the lives of professors—First, in actual sins—Secondly, in habitual declensions.

We are now to proceed unto other evidences of that sad truth which we are in the demonstration of. But the main of our work being passed through, I shall be more brief in the management of the arguments that do remain.

That, then, which in the next place may be fixed upon, is the de-

Digitized by Google

monstration which this law of sin hath in all ages given of its power and efficacy, by the woful fruits that it hath brought forth, even in believers themselves. Now, these are of two sorts:—1. The great *actual eruptions* of sin in their lives; 2. Their *habitual declensions* from the frames, state, and condition of obedience and communion with God, which they had obtained;—both which, by the rule of James, before unfolded, are to be laid to the account of this law of sin, and belong unto the fourth head of its progress, and are both of them convincing evidences of its power and efficacy.

1. Consider the fearful *eruptions* of actual sin that have been in the lives of believers, and we shall find our position evidenced. Should I go through at large with this consideration, I must recount all the sad and scandalous failings of the saints that are left on record in the holy Scripture; but the particulars of them are known to all, so that I shall not need to mention them, nor the many aggravations that in their circumstances they are attended with. Only some few things tending to the rendering of our present consideration of them useful may be remarked; as,—

(1.) They are most of them in the lives of men that were not of the *lowest form* or ordinary sort of believers, but of men that had a peculiar eminency in them on the account of their walking with God in their generation. Such were Noah, Lot, David, Hezekiah, and others. They were not men of an ordinary size, but higher than their brethren, by the shoulders and upwards, in profession, yea, in real holiness. And surely that must needs be of a mighty efficacy that could hurry such giants in the ways of God into such abominable sins as they fell into. An ordinary engine could never have turned them out of the course of their obedience. It was a poison that no athletic constitution of spiritual health, no antidote, could withstand.

(2.) And these very men fell not into their great sins at the *beginning of their profession*, when they had had but little experience of the goodness of God, of the sweetness and pleasantness of obedience, of the power and craft of sin, of its impulsions, solicitations, and surprisals; but after a long course of walking with God, and acquaintance with all these things, together with innumerable motives unto watchfulness. Noah, according to the lives of men in those days of the world, had walked uprightly with God some hundreds of years before he was so surprised as he was, Gen. ix. Righteous Lot seems to have been towards the end of his days ere he defiled himself with the abominations recorded. David, in a short life, had as much experience of grace and sin, and as much close, spiritual communion with God, as ever had any of the sons of men, before he was cast to the ground by this law of sin. So was it with Hezekiah in his degree, which was none of the meanest. Now, to set upon such persons, so

Digitized by Google

well acquainted with its power and deceit, so armed and provided against it, that had been conquerors over it for so many years, and to prevail against them, it argues a power and efficacy too mighty for every thing but the Spirit of the Almighty to withstand. Who can look to have a greater stock of inherent grace than those men had; to have more experience of God and the excellency of his ways, the sweetness of his love and of communion with him, than they had? who hath either better furniture to oppose sin withal, or more obligation so to do, than they? and yet we see how fearfully they were prevailed against.

(3.) As if God had permitted their falls on set purpose, that we might learn to be wary of this powerful enemy, they all of them fell out when they had newly received *great and stupendous mercies* from the hand of God, that ought to have been strong obligations unto diligence and watchfulness in close obedience. Noah was but newly come forth of that *world of waters*, wherein he saw the ungodly world perishing for their sins, and himself preserved by that astonishable miracle which all ages must admire. Whilst the world's desolation was an hourly remembrancer unto him of his strange preservation by the immediate care and hand of God, he falls into *drunkenness*. Lot had newly seen that which every one that thinks on cannot but tremble. He saw, as one speaks, "*hell coming out of heaven*" upon unclean sinners; the greatest evidence, except the cross of Christ, that God ever gave in his providence of the judgment to come. He saw himself and children delivered by the special care and miraculous hand of God; and yet, whilst these strange mercies were fresh upon him, he fell into *drunkenness and incest*. David was delivered out of all his troubles, and had the necks of his enemies given him round about, and he makes use of his peace from a world of trials and troubles to contrive *murder and adultery*. Immediately it was after Hezekiah's great and miraculous deliverance that he falls into his *carnal pride and boasting*. I say, their falls in such seasons seem to be permitted on set purpose to instruct us all in the truth that we have in hand; so that no persons, in no seasons, with what furniture of grace soever, can promise themselves security from its prevalency any other ways than by keeping close constantly to Him who hath supplies to give out that are above its reach and efficacy. Methinks this should make us look about us. Are we better than Noah, who had that testimony from God, that he was "a perfect man in his generations," and "walked with God?" Are we better than Lot, whose "righteous soul was vexed with the evil deeds of ungodly men," and is therefore commended by the Holy Ghost? Are we more holy, wise, and watchful than David, who obtained this testimony, that he was "a man after God's own heart?" or better than

Digitized by Google

Hezekiah, who appealed to God himself, that he had served him uprightly, with a perfect heart? And yet what prevalency this law of sin wrought in and over them we see. And there is no end of the like examples. They are all set up as buoys to discover unto us the sands, the shelves, the rocks, whereupon they made their shipwreck, to their hazard, danger, loss, yea, and would have done to their ruin, had not God been pleased in his faithfulness graciously to prevent it. And this is the first part of this evidence of the power of sin from its effects.

2. It manifests its power in *the habitual declensions* from zeal and holiness, from the frames, state, and condition of obedience and communion with God whereunto they had attained, which are found in many believers. Promises of growth and improvement are many and precious, the means excellent and effectual, the benefits great and unspeakable; yet it often falls out, that instead hereof decays and declensions are found upon professors, yea, in and upon many of the saints of God. Now, whereas this must needs principally and chiefly be from the strength and efficacy of indwelling sin, and is therefore a great evidence thereof, I shall first evince the observation itself to be true,—namely, that some of the saints themselves do oftentimes so decline from that growth and improvement in faith, grace, and holiness which might justly be expected from them,—and then show that the cause of this evil lies in that that we are treating of. And that it is the cause of total apostasy in unsound professors shall be after declared. But this is a greater work which we have in hand. The prevailing upon true believers unto a sinful declension and gradual apostasy, requires a putting forth of more strength and efficacy than the prevailing upon unsound professors unto total apostasy; as the wind which will blow down a *dead tree* that hath no root to the ground will scarcely shake or bow a *living, well-rooted tree*. But this it will do. There is mention made in the Scripture of "the first ways of David," and they are commended above his latter, 2 Chron. xvii. 3. The last ways even of David were tainted with the power of indwelling sin. Though we have mention only of the actual eruption of sin, yet that uncleanness and pride which was working in him in his numbering of the people were certainly rooted in a declension from his first frame. Those rushes did not grow without mire. David would not have done so in his younger days, when he followed God in the wilderness of temptations and trials, full of faith, love, humility, brokenness of heart, zeal, tender affection unto all the ordinances of God; all which were eminent in him. But his strength is impaired by the efficacy and deceitfulness of sin, his locks cut, and he becomes a prey to vile lusts and temptations. We have a notable instance in most of the churches that our Saviour

Digitized by Google

awakens to the consideration of their condition in the Revelation. We may single out one of them. Many good things were there in the church of Ephesus, chap. ii. 2, 3, for which it is greatly commended; but yet it is charged with a decay, a declension, a gradual falling off and apostasy: Verses 4, 5, "Thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works." There was a decay, both inward, in the frame of heart, as to faith and love, and outward, as to obedience and works, in comparison of what they had formerly, by the testimony of Christ himself. The same also might be showed concerning the rest of those churches, only one or two of them excepted. Five of them are charged with decays and declensions. Hence there is mention in the Scripture of the "kindness of youth," of the "love of espousals," with great commendation, Jer. ii. 2, 3; of our "first faith," 1 Tim. v. 12; of "the beginning of our confidence," Heb. iii. 14. And cautions are given that we "lose not the things that we have wrought," 2 John 8. But what need we look back or search for instances to confirm the truth of this observation? An habitual declension from first engagements unto God, from first attainments of communion with God, from first strictness in duties of obedience, is ordinary and common amongst professors.

Might we to this purpose take a general view of the professors in these nations,—among whom the lot of the best of us will be found, in part or in whole, in somewhat or in all, to fall,—we might be plentifully convinced of the truth of this observation:—

(1.) Is their *zeal* for God as warm, living, vigorous, effectual, solicitous, as it was in their first giving themselves unto God? or rather, is there not a common, slight, selfish frame of spirit in the room of it come upon most professors? Iniquity hath abounded, and their love hath waxed cold. Was it not of old a burden to their spirits to hear the name, and ways, and worship of God blasphemed and profaned? Could they not have said, with the psalmist, Ps. cxix. 136, "Rivers of waters run down our eyes, because men keep not thy law?" Were not their souls solicitous about the interest of Christ in the world, like Eli's about the ark? Did they not contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and every parcel of it, especially wherein the grace of God and the glory of the gospel was especially concerned? Did they not labour to judge and condemn the world by a *holy* and *separate* conversation? And do now the generality of professors abide in this frame? Have they grown, and made improvement in it? or is there not a coldness and indifference grown upon the spirits of many in this thing? yea, do not many despise all these things, and look upon their own former zeal as folly? May we not see many, who have formerly been of esteem in ways of profession,

Digitized by Google

become daily a scorn and reproach through their miscarriages, and that justly, to the men of the world? Is it not with them as it was of old with the daughters of Zion, Isa. iii. 24, when God judged them for their sins and wantonness? Hath not the world and self utterly ruined their profession? and are they not regardless of the things wherein they have formerly declared a singular concernment? yea, are not some come, partly on one pretence, partly on another, to an open enmity unto, and hatred of, the ways of God? They please them no more, but are evil in their eyes. But not to mention such open apostates any farther, whose hypocrisy the Lord Jesus Christ will shortly judge, how is it with the best? Are not almost all men grown cold and slack as to these things? are they not less concerned in them than formerly? are they not grown weary, selfish in their religion; and so things be indifferent well at home, scarce care how they go abroad in the world? at least, do they not prefer their ease, credit, safety, secular advantages before these things?—a frame that Christ abhors, and declares that those in whom it prevails are none of his. Some, indeed, seem to retain a good zeal for truth; but wherein they make the fairest appearance, therein will they be found to be most abominable. They cry out against errors,—not for truth, but for party's and interest's sake. Let a man be on their party and promote their interest, be he never so corrupt in his judgment, he is embraced, and, it may be, admired. This is not zeal for God, but for a man's self. It is not, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up," but, "Master, forbid them, because they follow not with us." Better it were, doubtless, for men never to pretend unto any zeal at all than to substitute such wrathful selfishness in the room of it.

(2.) Is men's *delight* in the ordinances and worship of God the same as in former days? do they find the same sweetness and relish in them as they have done of old? How precious hath the word been to them formerly! What joy and delight have they had in attendance thereon! How would they have run and gone to have been made partakers of it, where it was dispensed in its power and purity, in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit! Did they not call the Sabbath their delight, and was not the approach of it a real joy unto their souls? Did they not long after the converse and communion of saints, and could they not undergo manifold perils for the attainment of it? And doth this frame still abide upon them? Are there not decays and declensions to be found amongst them? May it not be said, "*Grey hairs are here and there upon them, and they perceive it not?*" Yea, are not men ready to say with them of old, "'What a weariness is it!' Mal. i. 13. It is even a burden and a weariness to be tied up to the observation of all these ordinances. What need we be at all so strict in the observation of the Sabbath?

Digitized by Google

What need we hear so often? What need this distinction in hearing?" Insensibly a great disrespect, yea, even a contempt of the pleasant and excellent ways of Christ and his gospel is fallen upon many professors.

(3.) May not the same conviction be farther carried on by an inquiry into *the universal course of obedience* and the performance of duties that men have been engaged in? Is there the same *conscientious tenderness of sinning* abiding in many as was in days of old, the same exact performance of private duties, the same love to the brethren, the same readiness for the cross, the same humility of mind and spirit, the same self-denial? The steam of men's lusts, wherewith the air is tainted, will not suffer us so to say.

We need, then, go no farther than this wretched generation wherein we live, to evince the truth of the observation laid down as the foundation of the instance insisted on. The Lord give repentance before it be too late!

Now, all these declensions, all these decays, that are found in some professors, they all proceed from this root and cause;—they are all the product of indwelling sin, and all evince the exceeding power and efficacy of it: for the proof whereof I shall not need to go farther than the general rule which out of James we have already considered,—namely, that lust or indwelling sin is the cause of all actual sin and all habitual declensions in believers. This is that which the apostle intends in that place to teach and declare. I shall, therefore, handle these two things, and show,—1. That this doth evince *a great efficacy and power* in sin; 2. Declare the ways and means whereby it *brings forth* or brings about this cursed effect;—all in design of our general end, in calling upon and cautioning believers to avoid it, to oppose it.

1. It appears to be a work of *great power and efficacy* from the provision that is made against it, which it prevails over. There is in the covenant of grace plentiful provision made, not only for the preventing of declensions and decays in believers, but also for their continual carrying on towards perfection; as,—

(1.) The *word* itself and all the ordinances of the gospel are appointed and given unto us for this end, Eph. iv. 11–15. That which is the end of giving gospel *officers* to the church is the end also of giving all the *ordinances* to be administered by them; for they are given "for the work of the ministry,"—that is, for the administration of the ordinances of the gospel. Now, what is or what are these ends? They are all for the preventing of decays and declensions in the saints, all for the carrying them on to perfection; so it is said, verse 12. In general, it is for the "perfecting of the saints," carrying on the work of grace in them, and the work of holiness and

Digitized by Google

obedience by them; or for the edifying of the body of Christ, their building up in an increase of faith and love, even of every true member of the mystical body. But how far are they appointed thus to carry them on, thus to build them up? Hath it bounds fixed to its work? Doth it carry them so far, and then leave them? "No," saith the apostle, verse 13. The dispensation of the word of the gospel, and the ordinances thereof, is designed for our help, assistance, and furtherance, until the whole work of faith and obedience is consummate. It is appointed to perfect and complete that faith, knowledge, and growth in grace and holiness, which is allotted unto us in this world. But what and if oppositions and temptations do lie in the way, Satan and his instruments working with great subtlety and deceit? Why, verse 14, these ordinances are designed for our safeguarding and deliverance from all their attempts and assaults, that so being preserved in the use of them, or "speaking the truth in love, we may grow up unto him in all things who is the head, even Christ Jesus." This is, in general, the use of all gospel ordinances, the chief and main end for which they were given and appointed of God,—namely, to preserve believers from all decays of faith and obedience, and to carry them on still towards perfection. These are means which God, the good husbandman, makes use of to cause the vine to thrive and bring forth fruit. And I could also manifest the same to be the especial end of them distinctly. Briefly, the word is milk and strong meat, for the nourishing and strengthening of all sorts and all degrees of believers. It hath both seed and water in it, and manuring with it, to make them fruitful. The ordinance of the supper is appointed on purpose for the strengthening of our faith, in the remembrance of the death of the Lord, and the exercise of love one towards another. The communion of saints is for the edifying each other in faith, love, and obedience.

(2.) There is that which adds weight to this consideration. God suffers us not to be *unmindful* of this assistance he hath afforded us, but is continually calling upon us to make use of the means appointed for the attaining of the end proposed. He shows them unto us, as the angel showed the water-spring to Hagar. Commands, exhortations, promises, threatenings, are multiplied to this purpose; see them summed up, Heb. ii. 1. He is continually saying to us, "Why will ye die? why will ye wither and decay? Come to the pastures provided for you, and your souls shall live." If we see a lamb run from the fold into the wilderness, we wonder not if it be torn and rent of wild beasts. If we see a sheep leaving its *green pastures* and watercourses, to abide in dry barren *heaths*, we count it no marvel, nor inquire farther, if we see him lean and ready to perish; but if we find lambs wounded in the *fold*, we wonder at the boldness and rage of

Digitized by Google

the beasts of prey that durst set upon them there. If we see sheep pining in *full pastures*, we judge them to be diseased and unsound. It is indeed no marvel that poor creatures who forsake their own mercies, and run away from the pasture and fold of Christ in his ordinances, are rent and torn with divers lusts, and do pine away with hunger and famine; but to see men living under and enjoying all the means of spiritual thriving, yet to decay, not to be fat and flourishing, but rather daily to pine and wither, this argues some secret powerful distemper, whose poisonous and noxious qualities hinder the virtue and efficacy of the means they enjoy. This is indwelling sin. So wonderfully powerful, so effectually poisonous it is, that it can bring leanness on the souls of men in the midst of all precious means of growth and flourishing. It may well make us tremble, to see men living under and in the use of the means of the gospel, preaching, praying, administration of sacraments, and yet grow colder every day than others in zeal for God, more selfish and worldly, even habitually to decline as to the degrees of holiness which they had attained unto.

(3.) Together with the dispensation of the *outward means* of spiritual growth or improvement, there are also supplies of grace continually afforded the saints from their head, Christ. He is the head of all the saints; and he is a *living* head, and so a living head as that he tells us that "because he liveth we shall live also," John xiv. 19. He communicates of spiritual life to all that are his. In him is the fountain of our life; which is therefore said to be "hid with him in God," Col. iii. 3. And this life he gives unto his saints by quickening of them by his Spirit, Rom. viii. 11; and he continues it unto them by the supplies of living grace which he communicates unto them. From these two, his quickening of us, and continually giving out supplies of life unto us, he is said to live in us: Gal. ii. 20, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me;"—"The spiritual life which I have is not mine own; not from myself was it educed, not by myself is it maintained, but it is merely and solely the work of Christ: so that it is not I that live, but he lives in me, the whole of my life being from him alone." Neither doth this living head communicate only a bare life unto believers, that they should merely live and no more, a poor, weak, dying life, as it were; but he gives out sufficiently to afford them a strong, vigorous, thriving, flourishing life, John x. 10. He comes not only that his sheep "may have life," but that "they may have it more abundantly;" that is, in a plentiful manner, so as that they may flourish, be fat and fruitful. Thus is it with the whole body of Christ, and every member thereof, Eph. iv. 15, 16, whereby it "grows up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working

Digitized by Google

in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." The end of all communications of grace and supplies of life from this living and blessed head, is the increase of the whole body and every member of it, and the edifying of itself in love. His treasures of grace are unsearchable; his stores inexhaustible; his life, the fountain of ours, full and eternal; his heart bounteous and large; his hand open and liberal: so that there is no doubt but that he communicates supplies of grace for their increase in holiness abundantly unto all his saints. Whence, then, is it that they do not all flourish and thrive accordingly? As you may see it oftentimes in a natural body, so is it here. Though the seat and rise of the blood and spirits in head and heart be excellently good and sound, yet there may be a withering member in the body; somewhat intercepts the influences of life unto it, so that though the heart and head do perform their office, in giving of supplies no less to that than they do to any other member, yet all the effect produced is merely to keep it from utter perishing,—it grows weak and decays every day. The withering and decaying of any member in Christ's mystical body is not for the want of his communication of grace for an abundant life, but from the powerful interception that is made of the efficacy of it, by the interposition and opposition of indwelling sin. Hence it is that where lust grows strong, a great deal of grace will but keep the soul alive, and not give it any eminency in fruitfulness at all. Oftentimes Christ gives very much grace where not many of its effects do appear. It spends its strength and power in withstanding the continual assaults of violent corruptions and lusts, so that it cannot put forth its proper virtue towards farther fruitfulness. As a virtuous medicine, that is fit both to check vicious and noxious humours, and to comfort, refresh, and strengthen nature, if the evil humour be strong and greatly prevailing, spends its whole strength and virtue in the subduing and correcting of it, contributing much less to the relief of nature than otherwise it would do, if it met not with such opposition; so is it with the eye-salve and the healing grace which we have abundantly from the wings of the Sun of Righteousness. It is forced oftentimes to put forth its virtue to oppose and contend against, and in any measure subdue, prevailing lusts and corruptions. That the soul receiveth not that strengthening unto duties and fruitfulness which otherwise it might receive by it is from hence. How sound, healthy, and flourishing, how fruitful and exemplary in holiness, might many a soul be by and with that grace which is continually communicated to it from Christ, which now, by reason of the power of indwelling sin, is only not dead, but weak, withering, and useless! And this, if any thing, is a notable evidence of the efficacy of indwelling sin, that it is able to give such a stop and check

Digitized by Google

to the mighty and effectual power of grace, so that notwithstanding the blessed and continual supplies that we receive from our Head, yet many believers do decline and decay, and that habitually, as to what they had attained unto, their *last* ways not answering their *first*. This makes the vineyard in the "very fruitful hill" to bring forth so many wild grapes; this makes so many trees barren in fertile fields.

(4.) Besides the *continual supplies of grace* that constantly, according to the tenure of the covenant, are communicated unto believers, which keeps them that they thirst no more as to a total indigence, there is, moreover, *a readiness* in the Lord Christ to yield peculiar succour to the souls of his, according as their occasions shall require. The apostle tells us that he is "a merciful High Priest," and "able" (that is, ready, prepared, and willing) "to succour them that are tempted," Heb. ii. 18; and we are on that account invited to "come with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need,"—that is, grace sufficient, seasonable, suitable unto any especial trial or temptation that we may be exercised withal. Our merciful High Priest is ready to give out this especial seasonable grace over and above those constant communications of supplies of the Spirit which we mentioned before. Besides the never-failing springs of ordinary covenant grace, he hath also peculiar refreshing showers for times of drought; and this is exceedingly to the advantage of the saints for their preservation and growth in grace; and there may very many more of the like nature be added. But now, I say, notwithstanding all these, and the residue of the like importance, such is the power and efficacy of indwelling sin, so great its deceitfulness and restlessness, so many its wiles and temptations, it often falls out that many of them for whose growth and improvement all this provision is made do yet, as was showed, go back and decline, even as to their course of walking with God. Samson's strength fully evidenced itself when he brake *seven new withes* and *seven new cords*, wherewith he was bound, as burning tow and as thread. The noxious humour in the body, which is so stubborn as that no use of the most sovereign remedies can prevail against it, ought to be regarded. Such is this indwelling sin if not watched over. It breaks all the cords made to bind it; it blunts the instruments appointed to root it up; it resists all healing medicines, though never so sovereign; and is therefore assuredly of exceeding efficacy. Besides, believers have *innumerable obligations* upon them, from the love, the command of God, to grow in grace, to press forward towards perfection, as they have abundant means provided for them so to do. Their doing so is a matter of the greatest advantage, profit, sweetness, contentment unto them in the world. It is the burden, the trouble of their souls, that they do not so do, that they are not more

Digitized by Google

holy, more zealous, useful, fruitful; they desire it above life itself. They know it is their duty to watch against this enemy, to fight against it, to pray against it; and so they do. They more desire his destruction than the enjoyment of all this world and all that it can afford. And yet, notwithstanding all this, such is the subtlety, and fraud, and violence, and fury, and urgency, and importunity of this adversary, that it frequently prevails to bring them into the woful condition mentioned. Hence it is with believers sometimes as it is with men in some places at sea. They have a good and fair gale of wind, it may be, all night long; they ply their tackling, attend diligently their business, and, it may be, take great contentment to consider how they proceed in their voyage. In the morning, or after a season, coming to measure what way they have made, and what progress they have had, they find that they are much backward of what they were, instead of getting one step forward. Falling into a swift tide or current against them, it hath frustrated all their labours, and rendered the wind in their sails almost useless; somewhat thereby they have borne up against the stream, but have made no progress. So is it with believers. They have a good gale of supplies of the Spirit from above; they attend duties diligently, pray constantly, hear attentively, and omit nothing that may carry them on their voyage towards eternity; but after a while, coming seriously to consider, by the examination of their hearts and ways, what progress they have made, they find that all their assistance and duties have not been able to bear them up against some strong tide or current of indwelling sin. It hath kept them, indeed, that they have not been driven and split on rocks and shelves,—it hath preserved them from gross, scandalous sins: but yet they have lost in their spiritual frame, or gone backwards, and are entangled under many woful decays; which is a notable evidence of the life of sin, about which we are treating. Now, because the end of our discovering *this power of sin* is, that we may be careful to obviate and prevent it in its operation; and, because of all the effects that it produceth, there is none more dangerous or pernicious than that we have last insisted on,—namely, that it prevails upon many professors unto an habitual declension from their former ways and attainments, notwithstanding all the sweetness and excellency which their souls have found in them;—I shall, as was said, in the next place, consider by what ways and means, and through what assistance, it usually prevails in this kind, that we may the better be instructed to watch against it.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XV.

Decays in degrees of grace caused by indwelling sin—The ways of its prevalency to this purpose.

2. THE ways and means whereby indwelling sin prevaileth on believers unto habitual declensions and decays as to degrees of grace and holiness is that now which comes under consideration; and they are many:—

(1.) Upon the *first conversion* and calling of sinners unto God and Christ, they have usually many fresh springs breaking forth in their souls and refreshing showers coming upon them, which bear them up to a high rate of faith, love, holiness, fruitfulness, and obedience; as upon a land-flood, when many lesser streams run into a river, it swells over its bounds, and rolls on with a more than ordinary fulness. Now, if these springs be not kept open, if they prevail not for the continuance of these showers, they must needs decay and go backwards. We shall name one or two of them:—

[1.] They have a *fresh, vigorous sense of pardoning mercy.* According as this is in the soul, so will its love and delight in God, so will its obedience be; as, I say, is the sense of gospel pardon, so will be the life of gospel love. Luke vii. 47, "I say unto thee," saith our Saviour of the poor woman, "Her sins, which were many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." Her great love was an evidence of great forgiveness, and her great sense of it: for our Saviour is not rendering a reason of her forgiveness, as though it were for her love; but of her love, that it was because of her forgiveness. Having in the foregoing parable, from verse 40 and onwards, convinced the Pharisee with whom he had to do that he to whom most was forgiven would love most, as verse 43, he thence gives an account of the great love of the woman, springing from the sense she had of the great forgiveness which she had so freely received. Thus sinners at their first conversion are very sensible of great forgiveness; "Of whom I am chief," lies next their heart. This greatly subdues their hearts and spirits unto all in God, and quickens them unto all obedience, even that such poor cursed sinners as they were should so freely be delivered and pardoned. The love of God and of Christ in their forgiveness highly conquers and constrains them to make it their business to live unto God.

[2.] The *fresh taste they have had of spiritual things* keeps up such a savour and relish of them in their souls, as that worldly contentments, whereby men are drawn off from close walking with God,

Digitized by Google

are rendered sapless and undesirable unto them. Having tasted of the wine of the gospel, they desire no other, for they say, "This is best." So was it with the apostles, upon that option offered them as to a departure from Christ, upon the apostasy of many false professors: "Will ye also go away?" John vi. 67. They answer by Peter, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life," verse 68. They had such a fresh savour and relish of the doctrine of the gospel and the grace of Christ upon their souls, that they can entertain no thoughts of declining from it. As a man that hath been long kept in a dungeon, if brought forth on a sudden into the light of the sun, finds so much pleasure and contentment in it, in the beauties of the old creation, that he thinks he can never be weary of it, nor shall ever be contented on any account to be under darkness again; so is it with souls when first translated into the marvellous light of Christ, to behold the beauties of the new creation. They see a new glory in him, that hath quite sullied the desirableness of all earthly diversions. And they see a new guilt and filth in sin, that gives them an utter abhorrency of its old delights and pleasures; and so of other things.

Now, whilst these and the like springs are kept open in the souls of converted sinners, they constrain them to a vigorous, active holiness. They can never do enough for God; so that oftentimes their zeal as saints suffers them not to escape without some blots on their prudence as men, as might be instanced in many of the martyrs of old.

This, then, is the first, at least one way whereby indwelling sin prepares men for decays and declensions in grace and obedience,—it endeavours to stop or taint these springs. And there are several ways whereby it brings this to pass:—

1*st*. It works by *sloth* and *negligence*. It prevails in the soul to a neglect of stirring up continual thoughts of or about the things that so powerfully influence it unto strict and fruitful obedience. If care be not taken, if diligence and watchfulness be not used, and all means that are appointed of God to keep a quick and living sense of them upon the soul, they will dry up and decay; and, consequently, that obedience that should spring from them will do so also. Isaac *digged wells*, but the Philistines *stopped them*, and his flocks had no benefit by them. Let the heart never so little disuse itself to gracious, soul-affecting thoughts of the love of God, the cross of Christ, the greatness and excellency of gospel mercy, the beauties of holiness, they will quickly be as much estranged to a man as he can be to them. He that shuts his eyes for a season in the sun, when he opens them again can see nothing at all. And so much as a man loseth of faith towards these things, so much will they lose of power towards him. They can do little or nothing upon him because of his unbe-

Digitized by Google

lief, which formerly were so exceedingly effectual towards him. So was it with the spouse in the Canticles, chap. v. 2; Christ calls unto her, verse 1, with a marvellous loving and gracious invitation unto communion with himself. She who had formerly been ravished at the first hearing of that joyful sound, being now under the power of sloth and carnal ease, returns a sorry excusing answer to his call, which ended in her own signal loss and sorrow. Indwelling sin, I say, prevailing by spiritual sloth upon the souls of men unto an inadvertency of the motions of God's Spirit in their former apprehensions of divine love, and a negligence of stirring up continual thoughts of faith about it, a decay grows insensibly upon the whole soul. Thus God oft complains that his people had "forgotten him;" that is, grew unmindful of his love and grace,—which was the beginning of their apostasy.

2*dly*. By *unframing the soul*, so that it shall have formal, weary, powerless thoughts of those things which should prevail with it unto diligence in thankful obedience. The apostle cautions us that in dealing with God we should use reverence and godly fear, because of his purity, holiness, and majesty, Heb. xii. 28, 29. And this is that which the Lord himself spake in the destruction of Nadab and Abihu, "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me," Lev. x. 3. He will be dealt withal in an awful, holy, reverent manner. So are we to deal with all the things of God wherein or whereby we have communion with him. The soul is to have a great reverence of God in them. When men begin to take them into slight or common thoughts, not using and improving them unto the utmost for the ends whereunto they are appointed, they lose all their beauty, and glory, and power towards them. When we have any thing to do wherein faith or love towards God is to be exercised, we must do it with all our hearts, with all our minds, strength, and souls; not slightly and perfunctorily, which God abhors. He doth not only require that we bear his love and grace in remembrance, but that, as much as in us lieth, we do it according to the worth and excellency of them. It was the sin of Hezekiah that he "rendered not again according to the benefits done to him," 2 Chron. xxxii. 25. So, whilst we consider gospel truths, the uttermost endeavour of the soul ought to be, that we may be "changed into the same image" or likeness, 2 Cor. iii. 18; that is, that they may have their full power and effect upon us. Otherwise, James tells us what our "beholding the glory of the Lord in a glass," there mentioned by the apostle,—that is, reading or hearing the mind of God in Christ revealed in the gospel,—comes unto: chap. i. 23, 24, "It is but like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth away, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." It makes no impression upon him, begets no idea or image of his

Digitized by Google

likeness in his imagination; because he doth it only slightly, and with a transient look. So is it with men that will indeed think of gospel truths but in a slight manner, without endeavouring, with all their hearts, minds, and strength, to have them ingrafted upon their souls, and all the effects of them produced in them. Now, this is the way of sinners in their first engagements unto God. They never think of pardoning mercy, but they labour to affect their whole souls with it, and do stir up themselves unto suitable affections and returns of constant obedience. They think not of the excellency of Christ and spiritual things, now newly discovered unto them in a saving light, but they press with all their might after a farther, a fuller enjoyment of them. This keeps them humble and holy, this makes them thankful and fruitful. But now, if the utmost diligence and carefulness be not used to improve and grow in this wisdom, to keep up this frame, indwelling sin, working by the vanity of the minds of men, will insensibly bring them to content themselves with slight and rare thoughts of these things, without a diligent, sedulous endeavour to give them their due improvement upon the soul. As men decay herein, so will they assuredly decay and decline in the power of holiness and close walking with God. The springs being stopped or tainted, the streams will not run so *swiftly*, at least not so *sweetly*, as formerly. Some, by this means, under an uninterrupted profession, insensibly wither almost into nothing. They talk of religion and spiritual things as much as ever they did in their lives, and perform duties with as much constancy as ever they did; but yet they have poor, lean, starving souls, as to any real and effectual communion with God. By the power and subtlety of indwelling sin they have grown formal, and learned to deal about spiritual things in an overly manner; whereby they have lost all their life, vigour, savour, and efficacy towards them. Be always serious in spiritual things if ever you intend to be bettered by them.

3*dly*. Indwelling sin oftentimes prevails to the stopping of these springs of gospel obedience, by false and foolish opinions corrupting the *simplicity* of the gospel. False opinions are the work of the flesh. From the vanity and darkness of the minds of men, with a mixture more or less of corrupt affections, do they mostly proceed. The apostle was jealous over his Corinthians in this matter. He was afraid lest their minds "should by any means be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ," 2 Cor. xi. 2, 3; which he knew would be attended by a decay and declension in faith, love, and obedience. And thus matters in this case often fall out. We have seen some who, after they have received a sweet taste of the love of God in Christ, of the excellency of pardoning mercy, and have walked humbly with God for many years in the faith and apprehension of

Digitized by Google

the truth, have, by the corruption of their minds from the simplicity that is in Christ, by false and foolish opinions, despised all their own experiences, and rejected all the efficacy of truth, as to the furtherance of their obedience. Hence John cautions the elect lady and her children to take heed they were not seduced, lest they should "lose the things that they had wrought," 2 Epist. verse 8;—lest they should themselves cast away all their former obedience as lost, and a thing of no value. We have innumerable instances hereof in the days wherein we live. How many are there who, not many years since, put an unspeakable value on the pardon of sin in the blood of Christ,—who delighted in gospel discoveries of spiritual things, and walked in obedience to God on the account of them,—who, being beguiled and turned aside from the truth as it is in Jesus, do despise these springs of their own former obedience! And as this is done grossly and openly in some, so there are more secret and more plausible insinuations of corrupt opinions tainting the springs and fountains of gospel obedience, and, through the vanity of men's minds, which is a principal part of indwelling sin, getting ground upon them. Such are all those that tend to the extenuation of *special grace* in its freedom and efficacy, and the advancement of the wills or the endeavours of men in their spiritual power and ability. They are works of the flesh; and howsoever some may pretend a usefulness in them to the promotion of holiness, they will be found to taint the springs of true evangelical obedience, insensibly to turn the heart from God, and to bring the whole soul into a spiritual decay.

And this is one way whereby indwelling sin produceth this pernicious effect of drawing men off from the power, purity, and fruitfulness attending their first conversion and engagements unto God, bringing them into habitual declension, at least as unto degrees, of their holiness and grace. There is not any thing we ought to be more watchful against, if we intend effectually to deal with this powerful and subtle enemy. It is no small part of the wisdom of faith, to observe whether gospel truths continue to have the same savour unto and efficacy upon the soul as formerly they have had; and whether an endeavour be maintained to improve them continually as at the first. A commandment that is always practised is always new, as John speaks of that of love. And he that really improves gospel truths, though he hears them a thousand times, they will be always new and fresh unto him, because they put him on newness of practice; when to another, that grows common under them, they are burdensome and common unto him, and he even loathes the manna that he is so accustomed unto.

(2.) Indwelling sin doth this *by taking men off from their watch against the returns of Satan.* When our Lord Christ comes first to

Digitized by Google

take possession of any soul for himself, he binds that strong man and spoils his goods; he deprives him of all his power, dominion, and interest. Satan being thus dispossessed and frustrated in his hopes and expectations, leaves the soul, as finding it newly mortified to his baits. So he left our Saviour upon his first fruitless attempts. But it is said he left him only "for a season," Luke iv. 13. He intended to return again, as he should see his advantage. So is it with believers also. Being cast out from his interest in them, he leaves them for a season, at least comparatively he doth so. Freed from his assaults and perplexing temptations, they proceed vigorously in the course of their obedience, and so flourish in the ways of God. But this holds not; Satan returns again, and if the soul stands not continually upon his guard against him, he will quickly get such advantages as shall put a notable interruption upon his fruitfulness and obedience. Hence some, after they have spent some time, it may be some years, in cheerful, exemplary walking with God, have, upon Satan's return, consumed all their latter days in wrestling with perplexing temptations, wherewith he hath entangled them. Others have plainly fallen under the power of his assaults. It is like a man who, having for a while lived usefully amongst his neighbours, done good and communicated according to his ability, distributing to the poor, and helping all around about him, at length, falling into the hands of vexatious, wrangling, oppressive men, he is forced to spend his whole time and revenue in defending himself against them at law, and so becomes useless in the place where he lives. So is it with many a believer: after he hath walked in a fruitful course of obedience, to the glory of God and edification of the church of Christ, being afresh set upon, by the return of Satan in one way or other, he hath enough to do all the remainder of his life to keep himself alive; in the meantime, as to many graces, wofully decaying and going backward. Now, this also, though Satan hath a hand in it, is from indwelling sin; I mean, the success is so which Satan doth obtain in his undertaking. This encourageth him, maketh way for his return, and gives entrance to his temptations. You know how it is with them out of whom he is cast only by gospel conviction; after he hath wandered and waited a while, he saith he will return to his house from whence he was ejected. And what is the issue? Carnal lusts have prevailed over the man's convictions, and made his soul fit to entertain returning devils. It is so as to the measure of prevalency that Satan obtains against believers, upon advantages administered unto him, by sin's disposing the soul unto an obnoxiousness to his temptations.

Now, the way and means whereby indwelling sin doth give advantage to Satan for his return are all those which dispose them toward a declension, which shall afterward be mentioned. Satan is a

Digitized by Google

diligent, watchful, and crafty adversary; he will neglect no opportunity, no advantage that is offered unto him. Wherein, then, soever our spiritual strength is impaired by sin, or which way soever our lusts press, Satan falls in with that weakness and presseth towards that ruin; so that all the actings of the law of sin are subservient to this end of Satan. I shall therefore only at present mention one or two that seem principally to invite Satan to attempt a return:—

[1.] It *entangleth the soul in the things of the world*, all which are so many purveyors for Satan. When Pharaoh had let the people go, he heard after a while that they were entangled in the wilderness, and supposeth that he shall therefore now overtake them and destroy them. This stirs him up to pursue after them. Satan finding those whom he hath been cast out from entangled in the things of the world, by which he is sure to find an easy access unto them, is encouraged to attempt upon them afresh, as the spider to come down upon the strongest fly that is entangled in his web; for he comes by his temptations only to impel them unto that whereunto by their own lusts they are inclined, by adding poison to their lusts, and painting to the objects of them. And oftentimes by this advantage he gets so in upon the souls of men, that they are never well free of him more whilst they live. And as men's diversions increase from the world, so do their entanglements from Satan. When they have more to do in the world than they can well manage, they shall have more to do from Satan than they can well withstand. When men are made spiritually faint, by dealing in and with the world, Satan sets on them, as Amalek did on the faint and weak of the people that came out of Egypt.

[2.] It produceth this effect by *making the soul negligent*, and taking it off from its watch. We have before showed at large that it is one main part of the effectual deceitfulness of indwelling sin to make the soul inadvertent, to turn it off from the diligent, watchful attendance unto its duty which is required. Now, there is not any thing in reference whereunto diligence and watchfulness are more strictly enjoined than the returning assaults of Satan: 1 Pet. v. 8, "Be sober, be vigilant." And why so? "Because of your adversary the devil." Unless you are exceeding watchful, at one time or other he will surprise you; and all the injunctions of our blessed Saviour to watch are still with reference unto him and his temptations. Now, when the soul is made careless and inadvertent, forgetting what an enemy it hath to deal withal, or is lifted up with the successes it hath newly obtained against him, then is Satan's time to attempt a re-entrance of his old habitation; which if he cannot obtain, yet he makes their lives uncomfortable to themselves and unfruitful to others, in weakening their root and withering their fruit through his poisonous temp-

Digitized by Google

tations. He comes down upon our duties of obedience as the fowls upon Abraham's sacrifice; so that if we watch not, as he did, to drive them away (for by resistance he is overcome and put to flight), he will devour them.

[3.] Indwelling sin takes advantage to put forth its efficacy and deceit to withdraw men from their primitive zeal and holiness, from their first faith, love, and works, *by the evil examples of professors* amongst whom they live. When men first engage into the ways of God, they have a reverent esteem of those whom they believe to have been made partakers of that mercy before themselves; these they love and honour, as it is their duty. But after a while they find many of them walking in many things unevenly, crookedly, and not unlike the men of the world. Here sin is not wanting to its advantage. Insensibly it prevails with men to a compliance with them. "This way, this course of walking, doth well enough with others; why may it not do so with us also?" Such is the inward thought of many, that works effectually in them. And so, through the craft of sin, the generation of professors corrupt one another. As a stream arising from a clear spring or a fountain, whilst it runs in its own peculiar channel and keeps its water unmixed, preserves its purity and cleanness, but when it falls in its course with other streams that are turbid and foul, though running the same way with it, it becomes muddy and discoloured also; so is it in this case. Believers come forth from the spring of the new birth with some purity and cleanness; this for a while they keep in the course of their private walking with God: but now, when they come sometimes to fall into society with others, whose profession flows and runs the same way with theirs, even towards heaven, but yet are muddied and sullied with sin and the world, they are often corrupted with them and by them, and so decline from their first purity, faith, and holiness. Now, lest this may have been the case of any who shall read this discourse, I shall add some few cautions that are necessary to preserve men from this infection:—

1*st*. In the body of professors there is a great number of *hypocrites*. Though we cannot say of this or that man that he is so, yet that some there are is most certain. Our Saviour hath told us that it will be so to the end of the world. All that have oil in their lamps have it not in their vessels. Let men take heed how they give themselves up unto a conformity to the professors they meet withal, lest, instead of saints and the best of men, they sometimes propose for their example hypocrites, which are the worst; and when they think they are like unto them who bear *the image of God*, they conform themselves unto those who bear *the image of Satan*.

2*dly*. You know not what may be *the present temptation* of those

Digitized by Google

whose ways you observe. It may be they are under some peculiar desertion from God, and so are withering for a season, until he send them some refreshing showers from above. It may be they are entangled with some special corruptions, which is their burden, that you know not of; and for any voluntarily to fall into such a frame as others are cast into by the power of their temptations, or to think that will suffice in them which they see to suffice in others whose distempers they know not, is folly and presumption. He that knows such or such a person to be a living man and of a healthy constitution, if he sees him go crawling up and down about his affairs, feeble and weak, sometimes falling, sometimes standing, and making small progress in any thing, will he think it sufficient for himself to do so also? will he not inquire whether the person he sees have not lately fallen into some distemper or sickness that hath weakened him and brought him into that condition? Assuredly he will so do. Take heed, Christians; many of the professors with whom ye do converse are sick and wounded,—the wounds of some of them do stink and are corrupt because of their folly. If you have any spiritual health, do not think their weak and uneven walking will be accepted at your hands; much less think it will be well for you to become sick and to be wounded also.

3*dly.* Remember that of many of *the best Christians, the worst* only is known and seen. Many who keep up precious communion with God do yet oftentimes, by their *natural tempers* of freedom or passion, not carry so glorious appearances as others who perhaps come short of them in grace and the power of godliness. In respect of their outward conversation it may seem they are scarcely saved, when in respect of their faith and love they may be eminent. They may, as the King's daughter, be all glorious within, though their clothes be not always of wrought gold. Take heed, then, that you be not infected with their worst, when ye are not able, it may be, to imitate them in their best. But to return.

[4.] Sin doth this work by cherishing some *secret particular lust in the heart.* This the soul contends against faintly. It contends against it upon the account of sincerity; it cannot but do so: but it doth not make thorough work, vigorously to mortify it by the strength and power of grace. Now, where it is thus with a soul, an habitual declension as to holiness will assuredly ensue. David shows us how, in his first days, he kept his heart close unto God: Ps. xviii. 23, "I was upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity." His great care was lest any one lust should prevail in him or upon him, that might be called his iniquity in a peculiar manner. The same course steered Paul also, 1 Cor. ix. 27. He was in danger to be lifted up by his spiritual revelations and enjoyments. This

Digitized by Google

makes him "keep his body in subjection," that no carnal reasonings or vain imagination might take place in him. But where indwelling sin hath provoked, irritated, and given strength unto a special lust, it proves assuredly a principal means of a general declension; for as an infirmity and weakness in any one vital part will make the whole body consumptive, so will the weakness in any one grace, which a perplexing lust brings with it, make the soul. It every way weakens spiritual strength. It weakens *confidence* in God in faith and prayer. The knees will be feeble and the hands will hang down in dealing with God, where a galling and unmortified lust lies in the heart. It will take such hold upon the soul that it shall not be "able to look up," Ps. xl. 12. It darkens the mind by innumerable foolish imaginations, which it stirs up to make provision for itself. It galls the conscience with those spots and stains which in and by its actings it brings upon the soul. It contends in the will for rule and dominion. An active, stirring corruption would have the commanding power in the soul, and it is ever and anon ready to take the throne. It disturbs the thoughts, and sometimes will even frighten the soul from dealing with it by meditation, lest, corrupt affections being entangled by it, grace loses ground instead of prevailing. It breaks out oftentimes into scandalous sins, as it did in David and Hezekiah, and loads the sinner with sorrow and discouragement. By these and the like means it becomes to the soul like a moth in a garment, to eat up and devour the strongest threads of it, so that though the whole hang loose together, it is easily torn to pieces. Though the soul with whom it is thus do for a season keep up a fair profession, yet his strength is secretly devoured, and every temptation tears and rends his conscience at pleasure. It becomes with such men as it is with some who have for many years been of a sound, strong, athletic constitution. Some secret, hectical distemper seizeth on them. For a season they take no notice of it, or, if they do, they think they shall do well enough with it, and easily shake it off when they have a little leisure to attend to it; but for the present, they think, as Samson with his locks cut, they will do as at other times. Sometimes, it may be, they complain that they are not well, they know not what aileth them, and it may be rise violently in an opposition to their distemper; but after a while struggling in vain, the vigour of their spirits and strength failing them, they are forced to yield to the power of a consumption. And now all they can do is little enough to keep them alive. It is so with men brought into spiritual decay by any secret perplexing corruption. It may be they have had a vigorous principle of obedience and holiness. Indwelling sin watching its opportunities, by some temptation or other hath kindled and inflamed some particular lust in them. For a while, it may be, they

Digitized by Google

take little notice of it. Sometimes they complain, but think they will do as in former times, until, being insensibly weakened in their spiritual strength, they have work enough to do in keeping alive what remains and is ready to die, Hos. v. 13. I shall not add any thing here as to the prevention and obviating this advantage of indwelling sin, having elsewhere treated of it peculiarly and apart.

[5.] It works by *negligence of private communion with God in prayer and meditation.* I have showed before how indwelling sin puts forth its deceitfulness in diverting the soul from watchfulness in and unto these duties. Here, if it prevails, it will not fail to produce an *habitual declension* in the whole course of obedience. All neglect of private duties is principled by a weariness of God, as he complaineth, Isa. xliii. 22, "Thou hast not called upon me, thou hast been weary of me." Neglect of invocation proceeds from weariness; and where there is weariness, there will be withdrawing from that whereof we are weary. Now, God alone being the fountain and spring of spiritual life, if there be a weariness of him and withdrawing from him, it is impossible but that there will a decay in the life ensue. Indeed, what men are *in these duties* (I mean as to faith and love in them), that they are, and no more. Here lies the root of their obedience; and if this fail, all fruit will quickly fail. You may sometimes see a tree flourishing with leaves and fruit, goodly and pleasant. After a while the leaves begin to decay, the fruit to wither, the whole to droop. Search, and you shall find the root, whereby it should draw in moisture and fatness from the earth to supply the body and branches with sap and juice for growth and fruit, hath received a wound, is some way perished, and doth not perform its duty, so that though the branches are flourishing a while with what they had received, their sustenance being intercepted they must decay. So it is here. These duties of private communion with God are the means of receiving supplies of spiritual strength from him,—of sap and fatness from Christ, the vine and olive. Whilst they do so, the conversation and course of obedience flourisheth and is fruitful,—all outward duties are cheerfully and regularly performed; but if there be a wound, a defect, a failing, in that which should first take in the spiritual radical moisture, that should be communicated unto the whole, the rest may for a season maintain their station and appearance, but after a while profession will wither, fruits will decay, and the whole be ready to die. Hence our Saviour lets us know, Matt. vi. 6, what a man is in secret, in these private duties, that he is in the eyes of God, and no more; and one reason amongst others is, because they have a more vigorous acting of *unmixed grace* than any other duties whatever. In all or most particular duties, besides the influence that they may have from carnal respects, which are many, and the ways

Digitized by Google

of their insinuation subtile and imperceptible, there is an *alloy of gifts*, which sometimes even devours the pure gold of grace, which should be the chief and principal in them. In these there is immediate intercourse between God and that which is of himself in the soul. If once sin, by its deceits and treacheries, prevail to take off the soul from *diligent attendance* unto communion with God and constancy in these duties, it will not fail to effect a declining in the whole of a man's obedience. It hath made its entrance, and will assuredly make good its progress.

[6.] Growing *in notions of truth without answerable practice* is another thing that indwelling sin makes use of to bring the souls of believers unto a decay. The apostle tell us that "knowledge puffeth up," 1 Cor. viii. 1. If it be alone, not improved in practice, it swells men beyond a due proportion; like a man that hath a dropsy, we are not to expect that he hath strength to his bigness; like trees that are continually running up a head, which keeps them from bearing fruit. When once men have attained to this, that they can entertain and receive evangelical truths in a new and more glorious light or more clear discovery than formerly, or new manifestations of truth which they knew not before, and please themselves in so doing, without diligent endeavours to have the power of those truths and notions upon their hearts, and their souls made conformable unto them, they generally learn so to dispose of all truths formerly known, which were sometimes inlaid in their hearts with more efficacy and power. This hath proved, if not the ruin, yet the great impairing of many in these days of light wherein we live. By this means, from humble, close walking, many have withered into an empty, barren, talking profession. All things almost have in a short season become alike unto them;—have they been true or false, so they might be debating of them and disputing about them, all is well. This is food for sin; it hatcheth, increaseth it, and is increased by it. A notable way it is for the vanity that is in the mind to exert itself without a rebuke from conscience. Whilst men are talking, and writing, and studying about religion, and hearing preaching, it may be, with great delight, as those in Ezek. xxxiii. 32, conscience, unless thoroughly awake and circumspect, and furnished with spiritual wisdom and care, will be very well pacified, and enter no rebukes or pleas against the way that the soul is in. But yet all this may be nothing but the acting of that natural vanity which lies in the mind, and is a principal part of the sin we treat of. And generally this is so when men content themselves, as was said, with the notions of truth, without labouring after an experience of the power of them in their hearts, and the bringing forth the fruit of them in their lives, on which a decay must needs ensue.

Digitized by Google

[7.] *Growth in carnal wisdom* is another help to sin in producing this sad effect. "Thy wisdom and thy knowledge," saith the prophet, "it hath perverted thee," Isa. xlvii. 10. So much as carnal wisdom increaseth, so much faith decays. The proper work of it is to teach a man to trust to and in himself; of faith, to trust wholly in another. So it labours to destroy the whole work of faith, by causing the soul to return into a deceiving fulness of its own. We have woful examples of the prevalency of this principle of declension in the days wherein we live. How many a poor, humble, broken-hearted creature, who followed after God in simplicity and integrity of spirit, have we seen, through the observation of the ways and walkings of others, and closing with the temptations to craft and subtlety which opportunities in the world have administered unto them, come to be dipped in a worldly carnal frame, and utterly to wither in their profession! Many are so sullied hereby that they are not known to be the men they were.

[8.] *Some great sin lying long in the heart and conscience unrepented of, or not repented of as it ought*, and as the matter requires, furthers indwelling sin in this work. The great turn of the life of David, whence his first ways carried the reputation, was in the harbouring his great sin in his conscience without suitable repentance. It was otherwise, we know, with Peter, and he had another issue. A great sin will certainly give a great turn to the life of a professor. If it be well cured in the blood of Christ, with that humiliation which the gospel requires, it often proves a means of more watchfulness, fruitfulness, humility, and contentation, than ever before the soul obtained. If it be neglected, it certainly hardens the heart, weakens spiritual strength, enfeebles the soul, discouraging it unto all communion with God, and is a notable principle of a general decay. So David complains, Ps. xxxviii. 5, "My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness." His present distemper was not so much from his sin as his folly,—not so much from the wounds he had received as from his neglect to make a timely application for their cure. It is like a broken bone, which, being well set, leaves the place stronger than before; if otherwise, makes the man a cripple all his days. These things we do but briefly name, and sundry other advantages of the like nature that sin makes use of to produce this effect might also be instanced in; but these may suffice unto our present purpose. Whatever it useth, itself is still the principle; and this is no small demonstration of its efficacy and power.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI.

The strength of indwelling sin manifested from its power and effects in persons unregenerate.

It is of the power and efficacy of indwelling sin, as it remains in several degrees in believers, that we are treating. Now, I have elsewhere showed that the nature and all the natural properties of it do still remain in them; though, therefore, we cannot prove directly what is the strength of sin in them, from what its power is in those in whom it is only checked and not at all weakened, yet may we, from an observation thereof, caution believers of the real power of that mortal enemy with whom they have to do.

If the plague do violently rage in one city, destroying multitudes, and there be in another an infection of the same kind, which yet arises not unto that height and fury there, by reason of the *correction* that it meets withal from a *better air* and *remedies used;* yet a man may demonstrate unto the inhabitants the force and danger of that infection got in among them by the effects that it hath and doth produce among others, who have not the benefit of the preventives and preservatives which they enjoy; which will both teach them to value the means of their preservation, and be the more watchful against the power of the infection that is among them. It is so in this case. Believers may be taught what is the power and efficacy of that plague of sin which is in and among them by the effects the same plague produceth in and among others, who have not those corrections of its poison and those preservatives from death which the Lord Jesus Christ hath furnished them withal.

Having, then, fixed on the demonstration of the power of sin from the effects it doth produce, and having given a double instance hereof in believers themselves, I shall now farther evidence the same truth or pursue the same evidence of it, by showing somewhat of the power that it acteth in them who are unregenerate, and so have not the remedies against it which believers are furnished withal.

I shall not handle the whole power of sin in unregenerate persons, which is a very large field, and not the business I have in hand; but only, by some few instances of its effects in them, intimate, as I said, unto believers what they have to deal withal:—

1. It appears in the *violence* it offers to the nature of men, compelling them unto sins fully contrary to all the principles of the reasonable nature wherewith they are endued from God. Every creature of God hath in its creation *a law of operation* implanted in it, which is the rule of all that proceedeth from it, of all that it doth of its own

Digitized by Google

accord. So the fire ascends upwards, bodies that are weighty and heavy descend, the water flows; each according to the principles of their nature, which give them the law of their operation. That which hinders them in their operation is force and violence; as that which hinders a stone from descending or the fire from going upwards. That which forceth them to move contrary to the law of their nature, as a stone to go upwards or the fire to descend, is in its kind the greatest violence, of which the degrees are endless. Now, that which should take a great millstone and fling it upwards into the air, all would acknowledge to be a matter of wonderful force, power, and efficacy.

Man, also, hath his law of operation and working concreated with him. And this may be considered two ways;—either, first, as it is *common* to him with other creatures; or as *peculiar*, with reference unto that special end for which he was made. Some things are, I say, in this law of *nature common to man with other creatures;* as to nourish their young, to live quietly with them of the same kind and race with them,—to seek and follow after that which is good for them in that state and condition wherein they are created. These are things which all brute living creatures have in the law of their nature, as man also hath.

But, now, besides these things, man being created in an especial manner to give glory to God by rational and moral obedience, and so to obtain a reward in the enjoyment of him, there are many things in the law of his creation that are peculiar to him,—as to *love God above all*, to seek the enjoyment of him as his chiefest good and last end, to inquire after his mind and will, and to yield obedience and the like; all which are part of the law of his nature.

Now, these things are not distinguished so, as though a man might perform the actions of the law of his nature, which are common to him with other creatures, merely from *the principles of his nature*, as they do; but the law of his dependence upon God, and doing all things in obedience unto him, passeth on them all also. He can never be considered as a *mere creature*, but as a creature made for the glory of God by rational, moral obedience,—*rational*, because by him chosen, and performed with reason; and *moral*, because regulated by a law whereunto reason doth attend.

For instance, it is common to man with other creatures *to take care for the nourishing of his children*, of the young, helpless ones that receive their being by him. There is implanted in him, in the principles of his nature, concreated with them, a love and care for them; so is it with other living creatures. Now, let other creatures answer this instinct and inclination, and be not hardened against them like the foolish ostrich, into whom God hath not implanted

Digitized by Google

this natural wisdom, Job xxxix. 16, 17, they fully answer the law of their creation. With man it is not so. It is not enough for him to answer the instinct and secret impulse and inclination of his nature and kind, as in the nourishing of his children; but he must do it also *in subjection to God*, and obey him therein, and do it unto his glory,—the law of moral obedience passing over all his whole being and all his operations. But in these things lie, as it were, the whole of a man, namely, in the things which are implanted in his nature as a creature, common to him with all other living creatures, seconded by the command or will of God, as he is a creature capable of yielding moral obedience and doing all things for his glory.

That, then, which shall drive and compel a man to transgress this law of his nature,—which is not only as to throw millstones upward, to drive beasts from taking care of their young, to take from cattle of the same kind the herding of themselves in quietness, but, moreover, to cast off, what lies in him, his fundamental dependence on God as a creature made to yield him obedience,—must needs be esteemed of great force and efficacy.

Now, this is frequently done by indwelling sin in persons unregenerate. Let us take some few instances:—

(1.) There is nothing that is more deeply inlaid in the principles of the natures of all living creatures, and so of man himself, than a love unto and a care for the preservation and nourishing of their young. Many brute creatures will die for them; some feed them with their own flesh and blood; all deprive themselves of that food which nature directs them to as their best, to impart it to them, and act in their behalf to the utmost of their power.

Now, such is the efficacy, power, and force of indwelling sin in man,—an infection that the nature of other creatures knows nothing of,—that in many it prevails to stop this fountain, to beat back the stream of natural affections, to root up the principles of the law of nature, and to drive them unto a neglect, a destruction of the fruit of their own loins. Paul tells us of the old Gentiles that they were ἄστοργοι, Rom. i. 31, "without natural affection." That which he aims at is that barbarous custom among the Romans, who ofttimes, to spare the trouble in the education of their children, and to be at liberty to satisfy their lusts, *destroyed their own children from the womb;* so far did the strength of sin prevail to obliterate the law of nature, and to repel the force and power of it.

Examples of this nature are common in all nations; amongst ourselves, of *women murdering their own children*, through the deceitful reasoning of sin. And herein sin turns the strong current of nature, darkens all the light of God in the soul, controls all natural principles, influenced with the power of the command and will of God.

Digitized by Google

But yet this evil hath, through the efficacy of sin, received a fearful aggravation. Men have not only slain but cruelly sacrificed their children to satisfy their lusts. The apostle reckons idolatry, and so, consequently, all superstition, among the works of the flesh, Gal. v. 20; that is, the fruit and product of indwelling sin. Now, from hence it is that men have offered that horrid and unspeakable violence to the law of nature mentioned. So the psalmist tells us, Ps. cvi. 37, 38. The same is again mentioned, Ezek. xvi. 20, 21, and in sundry other places. The whole manner of that abomination I have elsewhere declared. For the present it may suffice to intimate that they took their children and burnt them to ashes in a soft fire; the wicked priests that assisted in the sacrifice affording them this relief, that they made a noise and clamour that the vile wretches might not hear the woful moans and cries of the poor, dying, tormented infants. I suppose in this case we need no farther evidence. Naturalists can give no rational account, they can only admire the secret force of that little fish which, they say, will stop a ship in full sail in the midst of the sea; and we must acknowledge that it is beyond our power to give an account of that secret force and unsearchable deceit that is in that inbred traitor, sin, that can not only stop the course of nature, when all the sails of it, that carry it forward, are so filled as they are in that of affections to children, but also drive it backward with such a violence and force as to cause men so to deal with *their own children* as a good man would not be hired with any reward to deal with *his dog*. And it may not be to the disadvantage of the best to know and consider that they carry that about them and in them which in others hath produced these effects.

(2.) The like may be spoken of all other sins against the *prime dictates* of the law of nature, that mankind is or hath been stained and defamed withal,—murder of parents and children, of wives and husbands, sodomy, incest, and the like enormities; in all which sin prevails in men against the whole law of their being and dependence upon God.

What [why?] should I reckon up the murders of Cain and Abel, the treason of Judas, with their aggravations; or remind the filth and villany of Nero, in whom sin seemed to design an instance of what it could debase the nature of man unto? In a word, all the studied, premeditated perjuries; all the designed, bloody revenges; all the filth and uncleanness; all the enmity to God and his ways that is in the world,—is fruit growing from this root alone.

2. It evidences its efficacy in keeping men off from *believing* under the dispensation of the gospel. This evidence must be a little farther cleared:—

[1] See his work entitled, "A Dissertation on Divine Justice," chap. iv. vol. x.

Digitized by Google

(1.) Under the dispensation of the gospel, there are *but few that do believe.* So the preachers of it complain, Isa. liii. 1, "Who hath believed our report?" which the apostle interprets of the paucity of believers, John xii. 38. Our Saviour, Christ himself, tells us that "many are called,"—the word is preached unto many,—"but few are chosen." And so the church complains of its number, Micah vii. 1. Few there be who enter the narrow gate; daily experience confirms this woful observation. How many villages, parishes, yea, towns, may we go unto where the gospel, it may be, hath been preached many years, and perhaps scarce meet a true believer in them, and one who shows forth the death of Christ in his conversation! In the best places, and most eminent for profession, are not such persons like *the berries after the shaking of an olive-tree,*—two or three in the top of the upmost boughs, and four or five in the highest branches?

(2.) There is proposed to men in the preaching of the gospel, as *motives unto believing,* every thing in conjunction that *severally* prevails with men to do whatever else they do in their lives. Whatever any one doth with consideration, he doth it either because it is *reasonable* and good for him so to do, or *profitable* and advantageous, or *pleasant,* or, lastly, *necessary* for the avoidance of evil; whatever, I say, men do with consideration, whether it be good or evil, whether it be in the works of this life or in things that lead to another, they do it from one or other of the reasons or motives mentioned. And, God knows, ofttimes they are very poor and mean in their kind that men are prevailed upon by. How often will men, for a very *little pleasure,* a very *little profit,* be induced to do that which shall imbitter their lives and damn their souls; and what industry will they use to avoid that which they apprehend evil or grievous to them! And any one of these is enough to oil the wheels of men's utmost endeavours, and set men at work to the purpose.

But now all these things centre in the proposal of the gospel and *the command of believing;* and every one of them in a kind that the whole world can propose nothing like unto it:—

[1.] It is the most *reasonable* thing that can be proposed to the understanding of a man, that he who, through his own default, hath lost that way of bringing glory to God and saving his own soul (for which ends he was made) that he was first placed in, should accept of and embrace that other blessed, easy, safe, excellent way for the attaining of the ends mentioned, which God, in infinite grace, love, mercy, wisdom, and righteousness, hath found out, and doth propose unto him. And,—

[2.] It is the *profitablest* thing that a man can possibly be invited unto, if there be any profit or benefit, any advantage, in the forgive-

Digitized by Google

ness of sins, in the love and favour of God, in a blessed immortality, in eternal glory. And,—

[3.] It is most *pleasant* also. Surely it is a pleasant thing to be brought out of darkness into light,—out of a dungeon unto a throne,—from captivity and slavery to Satan and cursed lusts, to the glorious liberty of the children of God, with a thousand heavenly sweetnesses not now to be mentioned. And,—

[4.] It is surely *necessary*, and that not only from the command of God, who hath the supreme authority over us, but also indispensably so for the avoidance of eternal ruin of body and soul, Mark xvi. 16. It is constantly proposed under these terms: "Believe, or you perish under the weight of the wrath of the great God, and that for evermore."

But now, notwithstanding that all these considerations are preached unto men, and pressed upon them in the name of the great God from day to day, from one year to another, yet, as was before observed, very few there are who set their hearts unto them, so as to embrace that which they lead unto. Tell men ten thousand times that this is wisdom, yea, riches,—that all their profit lies in it,—that they will assuredly and eternally perish, and that, it may be, within a few hours, if they receive not the gospel; assure them that it is their only interest and concernment; let them know that God himself speaks all this unto them;—yet all is one, they regard it not, set not their hearts unto it, but, as it were, plainly say, "We will have nothing to do with these things." They will rather perish in their lusts than accept of mercy.

(3.) It is *indwelling sin* that both disenableth men unto and hinders them from believing, and that alone. Blindness of mind, stubbornness of the will, sensuality of the affections, all concur to keep poor perishing souls at a distance from Christ. Men are made blind by sin, and cannot see his excellencies; obstinate, and will not lay hold of his righteousness; senseless, and take no notice of their own eternal concernments.

Now, certainly that which can prevail with men wise, and sober, and prudent in other things, to neglect and despise the love of God, the blood of Christ, the eternal welfare of their own souls, upon weak and worthless pretences, must be acknowledged to have an astonishable force and efficacy accompanying it.

Whose heart, who hath once heard of the ways of God, can but bleed to see poor souls eternally perishing under a thousand gracious invitations to accept of mercy and pardon in the blood of Christ? And can we but be astonished at the power of that principle from whence it is that they run headlong to their own destruction? And yet all this befalls them from the power and deceit of sin that dwelleth in them.

Digitized by Google

3. It is evident in their *total apostasies*. Many men not really converted are much wrought upon by the word. The apostle tells us that they do "clean escape from them that live in error," 2 Pet. ii. 18. They separate themselves from idolatry and false worship, owning and professing the truth: and they also escape the "pollutions of the world," verse 20; that is, "the corruption that is in the world through lust," as he expresseth it, chap. i. 4,—those filthy, corrupt, and unclean ways which the men of the world, in the pursuit of their lusts, do walk and live in. These they escape from, in the amendment of their lives and ordering of their conversation according to the convictions which they have from the word; for so he tells us, that all this is brought about "through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,"—that is, by the preaching of the gospel. They are so far wrought upon as to forsake all ways of false worship, to profess the truth, to reform their lives, and to walk answerable to the convictions that are upon them.

By this means do they gain the reputation of professors: "They have a name to live," Rev. iii. 1, and are made "partakers" of some or all of those privileges of the gospel that are numbered by the apostle, Heb. vi. 4, 5.

It is not my present business to show how far or wherein a man may be *effectually wrought* upon by the word, and yet not be *really wrought* over to close with Christ, or what may be the utmost bounds and limits of a *common work* of grace upon unregenerate men. It is on all hands confessed that it may be carried on so far that it is very difficult to discern between its effects and productions and those of that grace which is special and saving.

But now, notwithstanding all this, we see many of these daily fall off from God, utterly and wickedly; some into debauchery and uncleanness, some to worldliness and covetousness, some to be persecutors of the saints,—all to the perdition of their own souls. How this comes about the apostle declares in that place mentioned. "They are," saith he, "*entangled again*." To entice and entangle, as I have showed before from James i. 14, 15, is the proper work of indwelling sin; it is that alone which entangles the soul, as the apostle speaks, 2 Pet. ii. 18, 20. They are allured from their whole profession into cursed apostasy through the lusts of the flesh.

It prevails upon them, through its deceit and power, to an utter relinquishment of their profession and their whole engagement unto God. And this several ways evinces the greatness of its strength and efficacy:—

(1.) In that it giveth stop or control unto that *exceeding greatness of power* which is put forth in the word in their conviction and reformation. We see it by experience that men are not easily wrought

Digitized by Google

upon by the word; the most of men can live under the dispensation of it all the days of their lives, and continue as senseless and stupid as the seats they sit upon, or the flint in the rock of stone. Mighty difficulties and prejudices must be conquered, great strokes must be given to the conscience, before this can be brought about. It is as the stopping of a river in his course, and turning his streams another way; the hindering of a stone in his falling downwards; or the turning away of the wild ass, when furiously set to pursue her way, as the prophet speaks, Jer. ii. 24. To turn men from their corrupt ways, sins, and pleasures; to make them pray, fast, hear, and do many things contrary to the principle of flesh, which is secretly predominant in them, willingly and gladly; to cause them to profess Christ and the gospel, it may be under some trials and reproaches; to give them light to see into sundry mysteries, and gifts for the discharge of sundry duties; to make dead, blind, senseless men to walk, and talk, and do all the outward offices and duties of living and healthy men, with the like attendancies of conviction and reformation, are the effects and products of mighty power and strength. Indeed, the power that the Holy Ghost puts forth by the word, in the staggering and conviction of sinners, in the wakening of their consciences, the enlightening of their minds, the changing of their affections, the awing of their hearts, the reforming of their lives and compelling them to duties, is inexpressible.

But now unto all these is there check and control given by indwelling sin. It prevails against this whole work of the Spirit by the word, with all the advantages of providential dispensations, in afflictions and mercies, wherewith it is attended. When sin is once enraged, all these things become but like the withes and cords wherewith Samson was bound before his head was shaven. Cry but to it, "The Philistines are upon thee; there is a subtle, a suitable temptation; now show thy strength and efficacy,"—all these things become like tow that has smelt the fire; conscience is stifled, reputation in the church of God despised, light supplanted, the impressions of the word cast off, convictions digested, heaven and hell are despised: sin makes its way through all, and utterly turns the soul from the good and right ways of God. Sometimes it doth this subtilely, by *imperceptible degrees*, taking off all force of former impressions from the Spirit by the word, sullying conscience by degrees, hardening the heart, and making sensual the affections by various workings, that the poor backslider in heart scarce knows what he is doing, until he be come to the very bottom of all impiety, profaneness, and enmity against God. Sometimes, falling in conjunction with some vigorous temptation, it suddenly and at once plunges the soul into a course of alienation from God and the profession of his ways.

Digitized by Google

(2.) It takes them off from those *hopes of heaven* which, upon their convictions, obedience, and temporary faith or believing, they had attained. There is a general hope of heaven, or at least of the escaping of hell, of an untroublesome immortality, in the most sottish and stupid souls in the world, who, either by tradition or instruction from the word, are persuaded that there is another state of things to come after this life; but it is, in unconvinced, unenlightened persons, a dull, senseless, unaffecting thing, that hath no other hold upon them nor power in them but only to keep them free from the trouble and perplexity of contrary thoughts and apprehensions. The matter is otherwise with them who by the word are so wrought upon as we have before declared; their hope of heaven and a blessed immortality is ofttimes accompanied with great joys and exultations, and is a relief unto them under and against the worst of their fears and trials. It is such as they would not part withal for all the world; and upon all occasions they retreat in their minds unto it for comfort and relief.

Now, all this by the power of sin are they prevailed withal to forego. Let heaven go if it will, a blessed immortality with the enjoyment of God himself, sin must be served, and provision made to fulfil the lusts thereof.

If a man, in the things of this world, had such a hope of a large inheritance, of a kingdom, as wherein he is satisfied that it will not fail him, but that in the issue he shall surely enjoy it, and lead a happy and a glorious life in the possession of it many days; if one should go to him and tell him, "It is true, the kingdom you look for is an ample and honourable dominion, full of all good things desirable, and you may attain it; but come, cast away all hopes and expectations of it, and come join with me in the service and slavery of such or such an oppressing tyrant;"—you will easily grant he must have some strange bewitching power with him, that should prevail with a man in his wits to follow his advice. Yet thus it is, and much more so, in the case we have in hand. Sin itself cannot deny but that the kingdom of heaven, which the soul is in hope and expectation of, is glorious and excellent, nor doth it go about to convince him that his thoughts of it are vain and such as will deceive him, but plainly prevails with him to cast away his hopes, to despise his kingdom that he was in expectation of, and that upon no other motive but that he may serve some worldly, cruel, or filthy and sensual lust. Certainly, here lies a secret efficacy, whose depths cannot be fathomed.

(3.) The apostle manifests the power of the entanglements of sin in and upon apostates, in that it turns them off from *the way of righteousness after they have known it*, 2 Pet. ii. 21. It will be found at the last day an evil thing and a bitter that men live all

Digitized by Google

their days in the service of sin, self, and the world, refusing to make any trial of the ways of God, whereunto they are invited. Though they have no experience of their excellency, beauty, pleasantness, safety; yet, having evidence brought unto them from God himself that they are so, the refusal of them will, I say, be bitterness in the latter end. But their condition is yet far worse, who, as the apostle speaks, "having known the way of righteousness," are by the power of indwelling sin "turned aside from the holy commandment." To leave God for the devil, after a man hath made some trial of him and his service,—heaven for hell, after a man hath had some cheering, refreshing thoughts of it,—the fellowship of the saints for an ale-house or a brothel-house, after a man hath been admitted unto their communion, and tasted of the pleasantness of it; to leave walking in pure, clear, straight paths, to wallow in mire, draughts and filth;—this will be for a lamentation: yet this doth sin prevail upon apostates unto; and that against all their light, conviction, experiences, professions, engagements, or whatever may be strong upon them to keep them up to the known ways of righteousness.

(4.) It evinces its strength in them by prevailing with them unto a *total renunciation of God* as revealed in Christ, and the power of all gospel truth,—in *the sin against the Holy Ghost*. I do not now precisely determine what is the sin against the Holy Ghost, nor wherein it doth consist. There are different apprehensions of it. All agree in this, that by it an end is put to *all dealings between God and man in a way of grace*. It is a sin unto death. And this doth the hardness and blindness of many men's hearts bring them to; they are by them at length set out of the reach of mercy. They choose to have no more to do with God; and God swears that they shall never enter into his rest: so sin brings forth death. A man by it is brought to renounce the end for which he was made, wilfully to reject the means of his coming to the enjoyment of God, to provoke him to his face, and so to perish in his rebellion.

I have not mentioned these things as though I hoped by them to set out to the full the power of indwelling sin in unregenerate men; only by a few instances I thought to give a glimpse of it. He that would have a fuller view of it had need only to open his eyes, to take a little view of that wickedness which reigneth, yea, rageth all the world over. Let him consider the prevailing flood of the things mentioned by Paul to be "the fruits of the flesh," Gal. v. 19–21,—that is, among the sons of men, in all places, nations, cities, towns, parishes; and then let him add thereunto but this one consideration, that the world, which is full of the steam, filth, and blood of these abominations, as to their outward actings of them, is a pleasant garden, a paradise, compared to the heart of man, wherein they are

Digitized by Google

all conceived, and hourly millions of more vile abominations, which, being stifled in the womb by some of the ways before insisted on, they are never able to bring forth to light;—let a man, I say, using the law for his light and rule, take this course, and if he have any spiritual discerning, he may quickly attain satisfaction in this matter.

And I showed in the entrance of this discourse how this consideration doth fully confirm the truth proposed.

CHAPTER XVII.

The strength of sin evidenced from its resistance unto the power of the law.

THE measure of the strength of any person or defenced city may be well taken from the opposition that they are able to withstand and not be prevailed against. If we hear of a city that has endured a long siege from a potent enemy, and yet is not taken or conquered, whose walls have endured great batteries and are not demolished, though we have never seen the place, yet we conclude it strong, if not impregnable.

And this consideration will also evidence the power and strength of indwelling sin. It is able to hold out, and not only to live, but also to secure its reign and dominion, against very strong opposition that is made to it.

I shall instance only in *the opposition that is made unto it by the law*, which is ofttimes great and terrible, always fruitless; all its assaults are borne by it, and it is not prevailed against. There are sundry things wherein the law opposeth itself to sin, and the power of it; as,—

1. It *discovers* it. Sin in the soul is like a secret hectical distemper in the body,—its being unknown and unperceived is one great means of its prevalency; or as traitors in a civil state,—whilst they lie hid, they vigorously carry on their design. The greatest part of men in the world know nothing of this sickness, yea, death of their souls. Though they have been taught somewhat of the *doctrine* of it, yet they know nothing of its *power*. They know it not so as to deal with it as their mortal enemy; as a man, whatever he be told, cannot be said to know that he hath a hectical fever, if he love his life, and set not himself to stop its progress.

This, then, the law doth,—it discovers this enemy; it convinceth the soul that there is such a traitor harbouring in its bosom: Rom. vii. 7, "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known

Digitized by Google

lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." "I had not known it;" that is, fully, clearly, distinctly. Conscience will somewhat tumultuate about it; but a man cannot know it clearly and distinctly from thence. It gives a man such a sight of it as the blind man had in the gospel upon the first touch of his eyes: "He saw men like trees walking,"—obscurely, confusedly. But when the law comes, that gives the soul a *distinct sight of this indwelling sin.* Again, "I had not known it;" that is, the depths of it, the root, the habitual inclination of my nature to sin, which is here called "lust," as it is by James, chap. i. 14. "I had not known it," or not known it to be sin, "but by the law." This, then, the law doth,—it draws out this traitor from secret lurking places, the intimate recesses of the soul. A man, when the law comes, is no more ignorant of his enemy. If he will now perish by him, it is openly and knowingly; he cannot but say that the law warned him of him, discovered him unto him, yea, and raised a concourse about him in the soul of various affections, as an officer doth that discovers a thief or robber, calling out for assistance to apprehend him.

2. The law not only discovers sin, but discovers it to be a very *bad inmate,* dangerous, yea, pernicious to the soul: Rom. vii. 13, "Was then that which is good,"—that is, the law,—"made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." There are many things in this verse wherein we are not at present concerned: that which I only aim at is the manifestation of sin by the law,—it *appears to be sin;* and the manifestation of it in its own colours,—it appears to be *exceeding sinful.* The law gives the soul to know the filth and guilt of this indwelling sin,—how great they are, how vile it is, what an abomination, what an enmity to God, how hated of him. The soul shall never more look upon it as a *small matter,* what thoughts soever it had of it before, whereby it is greatly surprised.

As a man that finds himself somewhat distempered, sending for a physician of skill, when he comes requires his judgment of his distemper; he, considering his condition, tells him, "Alas! I am sorry for you; the case is far otherwise with you than you imagine: your disease is mortal, and it hath proceeded so far, pressing upon your spirits and infecting the whole mass of your blood, that I doubt, unless most effectual remedies be used, you will live but a very few hours." So it is in this case. A man may have some trouble in his mind and conscience about indwelling sin; he finds all not so well as it should be with him, more from the effects of sin and its continual eruptions than the nature of it, which he hopes to wrestle withal. But now, when the law comes, that lets the soul know that its dis-

Digitized by Google

ease is deadly and mortal, that it is exceeding sinful, as being the root and cause of all his alienation from God; and thus also the law proceeds against it.

3. The law *judgeth the person*, or lets the sinner plainly know what he is to expect upon the account of this sin. This is the law's proper work; its discovering property is but preparative to its judging. The law is itself when it is in the throne. Here it minceth not the matter with sinners, as we use to do one with another, but tells him plainly, "'Thou' art the 'man' in whom this exceeding sinful sin doth dwell, and you must answer for the guilt of it." And this, methinks, if any thing, should rouse up a man to set himself in opposition to it, yea, utterly to destroy it. The law lets him know that upon the account of this sin he is obnoxious to the curse and wrath of the great God against him; yea, pronounceth the sentence of everlasting condemnation upon him upon that account. "Abide in this state and perish," is its language. It leaves not the soul without this *warning* in this world, and will leave it without *excuse* on that account in the world to come.

4. The law so follows on its sentence, that it *disquiets and affrights the soul*, and suffers it not to enjoy the least rest or quietness in harbouring its sinful inmate. Whenever the soul hath indulged to its commands, made provision for it, immediately the law flies upon it with the wrath and terror of the Lord, makes it quake and tremble. It shall have no rest, but is like a poor beast that hath a deadly arrow sticking in its sides, that makes it restless wherever it is and whatever it doth.

5. The law stays not here, but also it *slays* the soul, Rom. vii. 9; that is, by its conviction of the nature, power, and desert of this indwelling sin, it deprives him in whom it is of all that life of self-righteousness and hope which formerly he sustained himself withal, —it leaves him as a poor, dead, helpless, hopeless creature; and all this in the pursuit of that opposition that it makes against this sin. May we not now expect that the power of it will be quelled and its strength broken,—that it will die away before these strokes of the law of God? But the truth is, such is its power and strength, that it is quite otherwise. Like him whom the poets feign to be born of the earth, when one thought to slay him by casting him on the ground, by every fall he recovered new strength, and was more vigorous than formerly; so is it with all the falls and repulses that are given to indwelling sin by the law: for,—

(1.) It is not *conquered*. A conquest infers two things in respect of the conquered,—first, *loss of dominion;* and, secondly, *loss of strength*. Whenever any one is conquered he is despoiled of both these; he loses both his authority and his power. So the strong

Digitized by Google

man armed, being prevailed against, he is bound and his goods are spoiled. But now neither of these befalls indwelling sin by the assaults of the law. It loseth not one jot of its dominion nor strength by all the blows that are given unto it. The law cannot do this thing, Rom. viii. 3; it cannot deprive sin of its power and dominion, for he that "is under the law is also under sin;"—that is, whatever power the law gets upon the conscience of a man, so that he fear to sin, lest the sentence and curse of it should befall him, yet sin still reigns and rules in his heart. Therefore saith the apostle, Rom. vi. 14, "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace;" intimating plainly, that though a person be in never so much subjection to the authority of the law, yet that will not exempt and acquit him from the dominion of sin. Yea, the law, by all its work upon the soul, instead of freeing and acquitting it from the reign of sin and bondage unto it, doth accidentally greatly increase its misery and bondage, as the sentence of the judge on the bench against a malefactor adds to his misery. The soul is under the dominion of sin, and, it may be, abides in its woful condition in much security, fearing neither sin nor judgment. The law setting upon him in this condition, by all the ways fore mentioned, brings him into great trouble and perplexity, fear and terror, but delivers him not at all. So that it is with the soul as it was with the Israelites when Moses had delivered his message unto Pharaoh; they were so far from getting liberty by it that their bondage was increased, and "they found that they were in a very evil case," Exod. v. 19. Yea, and we shall see that sin doth like Pharaoh; finding its rule disturbed, it grows more outrageously oppressive, and doubles the bondage of their souls. This is not, then, the work of the law, to destroy sin, or deprive it of that dominion which it hath by nature. Nor doth it, by all these strokes of the law, lose any thing of its strength; it continues both its authority and its force; it is neither destroyed nor weakened; yea,—

(2.) It is so far from being conquered that it is only *enraged*. The whole work of the law doth only provoke and enrage sin, and cause it, as it hath opportunity, to put out its strength with more power, and vigour, and force than formerly. This the apostle shows at large, Rom. vii. 9–13.

But you will say, "Do we not see it by experience, that many are wrought upon by the preaching of the law to a relinquishment of many sins and amendment of their lives, and to a great contending against the eruptions of those other corruptions which they cannot yet mortify? And it cannot be denied but that great is the power and efficacy of the law when preached and applied to the conscience in a due manner." I answer,—

Digitized by Google

[1.] It is acknowledged that very great and effectual is the power of the law of God. Great are the effects that are wrought by it, and it shall surely accomplish every end for which of God it is appointed. But yet the *subduing* of sin is none of its work,—it is not designed of God unto that purpose; and therefore it is no dishonour if it cannot do that which is not its proper work, Rom. viii. 3.

[2.] Whatever effects it have upon *some*, yet we see that in the *most*, such is the power and prevalency of sin, that it takes no impression at all upon them. May you not see everywhere men living many years in congregations where the law is powerfully preached, and applied unto the consciences as to all the ends and purposes for which the Lord is pleased to make use of it, and not once be moved by it,—that receive no more impression from the stroke of it than blows with a straw would give to an adamant? They are neither convinced by it, nor terrified, nor awed, nor instructed; but continue deaf, ignorant, senseless, secure, as if they had never been told of the guilt of sin or terror of the Lord. Such as these are congregations full of, who proclaim the triumphing power of sin over the dispensation of the law.

[3.] When any of the effects mentioned are wrought, it is not from the power of *the letter of the law*, but from the actual efficacy of the Spirit of God putting forth his virtue and power for that end and purpose; and we deny not but that the Spirit of the Lord is able to restrain and quell the power of lust when he pleaseth, and some ways whereby he is pleased so to do we have formerly considered. But,—

[4.] Notwithstanding all that may be observed of the power of the law upon the souls of men, yet it is most evident that lust is not *conquered*, not subdued, nor mortified by it; for,—

1*st.* Though the *course* of sin may be repelled for a season by the dispensation of the law, yet the spring and fountain of it is not dried up thereby. Though it withdraws and hides itself for a season, it is, as I have elsewhere showed, but to shift out of a storm, and then to return again. As a traveller, in his way meeting with a violent storm of thunder and rain, immediately turns out of his way to some house or tree for his shelter, but yet this causeth him not to give over his journey,—so soon as the storm is over he returns to his way and progress again; so it is with men in bondage unto sin. They are in a course of pursuing their lusts; the law meets with them in a storm of thunder and lightning from heaven, terrifies and hinders them in their way. This turns them for a season out of their course; they will run to prayer or amendment of life, for some shelter from the storm of wrath which is feared coming upon their consciences. But is their course stopped? are their principles altered? Not at all; so soon as the storm is over, [so] that they begin to wear

Digitized by Google

out that sense and the terror that was upon them, they return to their former course in the service of sin again. This was the state with Pharaoh once and again.

2*dly*. In such seasons sin is not *conquered*, but *diverted*. When it seems to fall under the power of the law, indeed it is only turned into a new channel; it is not dried up. If you go and set a dam against the streams of a river, so that you suffer no water to pass in the old course and channel, but it breaks out another way, and turns all its streams in a new course, you will not say you have dried up that river, though some that come and look into the old channel may think, perhaps, that the waters are utterly gone. So is it in this case. The streams of sin, it may be, run in open sensuality and profaneness, in drunkenness and viciousness; the preaching of the law sets a dam against these courses,—conscience is terrified, and the man dares not walk in the ways wherein he hath been formerly engaged. His companions in sin, not finding him in his old ways, begin to laugh at him, as one that is converted and growing precise; professors themselves begin to be persuaded that the work of God is upon his heart, because they see his old streams dried up: but if there have been only a work of the law upon him, there is a dam put to his course, but the spring of sin is not dried up, only the streams of it are turned another way. It may be the man is fallen upon other more secret or more spiritual sins; or if he be beat from them also, the whole strength of lust and sin will take up its residence in self-righteousness, and pour out thereby as filthy streams as in any other way whatever. So that notwithstanding the whole work of the law upon the souls of men, indwelling sin will keep alive in them still: which is another evidence of its great power and strength.

I shall yet touch upon some other evidences of the same truth that I have under consideration; but I shall be brief in them.

1. In the next place, then, the *great endeavours of men ignorant of the righteousness of Christ*, for the *subduing* and mortifying of sin, which are all fruitless, do evidence the great strength and power of it.

Men who have no *strength against sin* may yet be made sensible of *the strength of sin*. The way whereby, for the most part, they come to that knowledge is by some previous sense that they have of the guilt of sin. This men have by the light of their consciences; they cannot avoid it. This is not a thing in their choice; whether they will or no, they cannot but know sin to be evil, and that such an evil that renders them obnoxious to the judgment of God. This galls the minds and consciences of some so far as that they are kept in awe, and dare not sin as they would. Being awed with a sense of

Digitized by Google

the guilt of sin and the terror of the Lord, men begin to endeavour to *abstain from sin*, at least from such sins as they have been most terrified about. Whilst they have this design in hand, the strength and power of sin begins to discover itself unto them. They begin to find that there is something in them that is not in their own power; for, notwithstanding their resolutions and purposes, they sin still, and that so, or in such a manner, as that their consciences inform them that they must therefore perish eternally. This puts them on self-endeavours to suppress the eruption of sin, because they cannot be quiet unless so they do, nor have any rest or peace within. Now, being ignorant of that only way whereby sin is to be mortified,—that is, by the Spirit of Christ,—they fix on many ways in their own strength to suppress it, if not to slay it; as being ignorant of that only way whereby consciences burdened with the guilt of sin may be pacified, —that is, by the blood of Christ,—they endeavour, by many other ways, to accomplish that end in vain: for no man, by any self-endeavours, can obtain peace with God.

Some of the ways whereby they endeavour to suppress the power of sin, which casts them into an unquiet condition, and their insufficiency for that end, we must look into:—

(1.) They will promise and bind themselves by *vows* from those sins which they have been most liable unto, and so have been most perplexed withal. The psalmist shows this to be one great engine whereby false and hypocritical persons do endeavour to extricate and deliver themselves out of trouble and perplexity. They make promises to God, which he calls flattering him with the mouth, Ps. lxxviii. 36. So is it in this case. Being freshly galled with the guilt of any sin, that, by the power of their temptations, they, it may be, have frequently been overtaken in, they vow and promise that, at least for some *such space of time* as they will limit, they will not commit that sin again; and this course of proceeding is prescribed unto them by some who pretend to direct their consciences in this duty. Conscience of this now makes them watch over themselves as to the outward act of the sin that they are galled with; and so it hath one of these two effects,—for either they do abstain from it for the time they have prefixed, or they do not. If they do not, as seldom they do, especially if it be a sin that hath a peculiar root in their nature and constitution, and is improved by custom into a habit, if any suitable temptation be presented unto them, their sin is increased, and therewith their terror, and they are wofully discouraged in making any opposition to sin; and therefore, for the most part, after one or two vain attempts, or more, it may be, knowing no other way to mortify sin but this of vowing against it, and keeping of that vow in their own strength, they give over all contests, and become wholly the ser-

Digitized by Google

vants of sin, being bounded only by outward considerations, without any serious endeavours for a recovery. Or, secondly, suppose that they have success in their resolutions, and do abstain from actual sins their appointed season, commonly one of these two things ensues,—either they think that they have *well discharged their duty*, and so may a little now, at least for a season, indulge to their corruptions and lusts, and so are entangled again in the same snares of sin as formerly; or else they reckon that their vow and promise hath preserved them, and so *sacrifice to their own net and drag*, setting up a righteousness of their own against the grace of God,—which is so far from weakening indwelling sin, that it strengthens it in the root and principle, that it may hereafter reign in the soul in security. Or, at the most, the best success that can be imagined unto this way of dealing with sin is but the *restraining* of some outward eruptions of it, which tends nothing to the weakening of its power; and therefore such persons, by all their endeavours, are very far from being freed from the inward toiling, burning, disquieting, perplexing power of sin. And this is the state of most men that are kept in bondage under the power of conviction. Hell, death, and the wrath of God, are continually presented unto their consciences; this makes them labour with all their strength against that in sin which most enrageth their consciences and most increaseth their fears,—that is, the actual eruption of it: for, for the most part, while they are freed from that they are safe, though, in the meantime, sin lie tumultuating in and defiling of the heart continually. As with running sores, outward repelling medicines may skin them over, and hinder their corruption from coming forth, but the issue of them is, that they cause them to fester inwardly, and so prove, though it may be not so noisome and offensive as they were before, yet far more dangerous: so is it with this repelling of the power of corruption by men's vows and promises against it,—external eruptions are, it may be, restrained for a season, but the inward root and principle is not weakened in the least. And most commonly this is the issue of this way:—that sin, having gotten more strength, and being enraged by its restraint, breaks all its bounds, and captivates the soul unto all filthy abominations; which is the principle, as was before observed, of most of the visible apostasies which we have in the world, 2 Pet. ii. 19, 20.

The Holy Ghost compares sinners, because of the odious, fierce, poisonous nature of this indwelling sin, unto lions, bears, and asps, Isa. xi. 6–9. Now, this is the excellency of gospel grace, that it changes the nature and inward principles of these otherwise passionate and untamed beasts, making the wolf as the kid, the lion as the lamb, and the bear as the cow. When this is effected, they may safely be trusted in,—" a little child may lead them." But these self-

Digitized by Google

endeavours do not at all change the nature, but restrain their outward violence. He that takes a lion or a wolf and shuts him up from ravening, whilst yet his inward violence remains, may well expect that at one time or other they will break their bonds, and fall to their former ways of rapine and violence. However, shutting them up doth not, as we see, change their natures, but only restrain their rage from doing open spoil. So it is in this case: it is grace alone that *changeth the heart* and takes away that poison and fierceness that is in them by nature; men's self-endeavours do but coerce them as to some outward eruptions. But,—

(2.) Beyond bare *vows* and *promises*, with some watchfulness to observe them in a rational use of ordinary means, men have put, and some do yet put, themselves on *extraordinary ways* of mortifying sin. This is the foundation of all that hath a show of wisdom and religion in the Papacy: their hours of prayer, fastings; their immuring and cloistering themselves; their pilgrimages, penances, and self-torturing discipline,—spring all from this root. I shall not speak of the innumerable evils that have attended these self-invented ways of mortification, and how they all of them have been turned into means, occasions, and advantages of sinning; nor of the horrible hypocrisy which evidently cleaves unto the most of their observers; nor of that superstition which gives life to them all, being a thing rivetted in the natures of some and their constitutions, fixed on others by inveterate prejudices, and the same by others taken up for secular advantages. But I will suppose the best that can be made of it, and it will be found to be a *self-invented design* of men ignorant of the righteousness of God, to give a check to this power of indwelling sin whereof we speak. And it is almost incredible what fearful self-macerations and horrible sufferings this design hath carried men out unto; and, undoubtedly, their blind zeal and superstition will rise in judgment and condemn the horrible sloth and negligence of the most of them to whom the Lord hath granted the saving light of the gospel. But what is the end of these things? The apostle, in brief, gives us an account, Rom. ix. 31, 32. They attain not the righteousness aimed at; they come not up unto a conformity to the law: sin is not mortified, no, nor the power of it weakened; but what it loses in sensual, in carnal pleasures, it takes up with great advantage in blindness, darkness, superstition, self-righteousness, and soul-pride, contempt of the gospel and the righteousness of it, and reigns no less than in the most profligate sinners in the world.

2. The strength, efficacy, and power of this law of sin may be farther evidenced from its life and in-being in the soul, notwithstanding the wound that is given unto it in the first conversion of the soul to God; and in the continual opposition that is made unto

Digitized by Google

it by grace. But this is the subject and design of another endeavour.

It may now be expected that we should here add the especial *uses* of all this discovery that hath been made of the *power, deceit, prevalency, and success* of this great adversary of our souls. But as for what concerns that humility, self-abasement, watchfulness, diligence, and application unto the Lord Christ for relief, which will become those who find in themselves, by experience, the power of this law of sin, [these] have been occasionally mentioned and inculcated through the whole preceding discourse; so, for what concerns the actual *mortification* of it, I shall only recommend unto the reader, for his direction, another small treatise, written long since, unto that purpose, which I suppose he may do well to consider together with this, if he find these things to be his concernment.

"To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."

Digitized by Google

A

PRACTICAL EXPOSITION UPON PSALM CXXX.;

WHEREIN

THE NATURE OF THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN IS DECLARED; THE TRUTH AND REALITY OF IT ASSERTED; AND THE CASE OF A SOUL DISTRESSED WITH THE GUILT OF SIN, AND RELIEVED BY A DISCOVERY OF FORGIVENESS WITH GOD, IS AT LARGE DISCOURSED.

"Search the Scriptures."—John v. 39.

Imprimatur,

Rob. Grove, R. P. Humph. Dom. Episc. Lond. à Sac. Dom.

Octob. 12, 1668.

Digitized by Google

PREFATORY NOTE.

THE circumstances in which this Exposition of Psalm CXXX. originated are peculiarly interesting. Dr Owen himself, in a statement made to Mr Richard Davis, who ultimately became pastor of a church in Rowel, Northamptonshire, explains the occasion which led him to a very careful examination of the fourth verse in the psalm. Mr Davis, being under religious impressions, had sought a conference with Owen. In the course of the conversation, Dr Owen put the question, "Young man, pray in what manner do you think to go to God?" "Through the Mediator, sir," answered Mr Davis. "That is easily said," replied the Doctor, "but I assure you it is another thing to go to God through the Mediator than many who make use of the expression are aware of. I myself preached Christ," he continued, "some years, when I had but very little, if any, experimental acquaintance with access to God through Christ; until the Lord was pleased to visit me with sore affliction, whereby I was brought to the mouth of the grave, and under which my soul was oppressed with horror and darkness; but God graciously relieved my spirit by a powerful application of Psalm CXXX. 4, 'But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared;' from whence I received special instruction, peace, and comfort, in drawing near to God through the Mediator, and preached thereupon immediately after my recovery." The incident to which he refers had occurred at an early period in his public life; and it is probable this Exposition is the substance of the discourses which he preached on his recovery from affliction, under the influence of enlivened faith in the mediation of Christ. We cannot wonder that the particular verse which had proved to Owen a spring of refreshment in a weary place, should receive prominent and prolonged consideration in this work. The exposition of it constitutes nearly three-fourths of the whole treatise. These facts, moreover, account for its prevailing character. It is hardly a specimen of pure commentary, so much as a series of discourses, with the verses of the psalm, and more especially the fourth verse, as the texts selected. The charge of prolixity and diffuseness, urged against this work, applies only if it be tried by the rules according to which we estimate the merits of a commentary. There are, for example, thirteen separate facts and arguments, illustrative of the great doctrine that there is forgiveness with God, each opening up very precious mines of thought and inquiry, but all of them out of place, at least in the length to which they extend, if viewed simply as the exposition of a verse. The reader bent on his own edification, rather than on judging of the work by the standard of a very rigid criticism, not unthankful for what of commentary proper it contains, will be happy that the author took a course leaving him free to indulge in that teeming opulence of evangelical illustration, and frequency of awakening appeals, which impart a distinctive character and peculiar interest to the work.

The original imprimatur of the volume bears date 1668; and such, according to all authorities, was the year in which it first appeared. We have seen an edition printed in 1669, and another printed in 1680. The latter must correspond with, and must have been printed from the first edition, for it contains some sentences quite obscure and incomplete, which are corrected in the edition of 1669. It is singular, also, that every modern reprint should embody the inaccuracies of the first edition.—ED.

Digitized by Google

TO THE READER.

CHRISTIAN READER,

THE ensuing exposition and discourses are intended for the benefit of those whose spiritual state and condition is represented in the psalm here explained. That these are not a few, that they are many, yea, that to some part or parts of it they are all who believe, both the Scriptures and their own experience will bear testimony. Some of them, it may be, will inquire into and after their own concernments, as they are here declared. To be serviceable to their faith, peace, and spiritual consolation hath been the whole of my design. If they meet with any discovery of truth, any due application of it to their consciences, any declaration of the sense and mind of the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures, suitable unto their condition and useful to their edification, much of my end and purpose is obtained.

I know some there are that dislike all discourses of this nature, and look upon them with contempt and scorn; but why they should so do I know not, unless the gospel itself, and all the mysteries of it, be folly unto them. Sin and grace in their original causes, various respects, consequents, and ends, are the principal subjects of the whole Scripture, of the whole revelation of the will of God to mankind. In these do our present and eternal concernments lie, and from and by them hath God designed the great and everlasting exaltation of his own glory. Upon these do turn all the transactions that are between God and the souls of men. That it should be an endeavour needless or superfluous, to inquire into the will of God about, and our own interest in, these things, who can imagine? Two ways there are whereby this may be done,—first, speculatively, by a due investigation of the nature of these things, according as their doctrine is declared in the Scripture. An endeavour according to the mind of God herein is just and commendable, and comprehensive of most of the chief heads of divinity. But this is not to be engaged in for its own sake. The knowledge of God and spiritual things has this proportion unto practical sciences, that the end of all its notions and doctrines consists in practice. Wherefore, secondly, these things are to be considered practically; that is, as the souls and consciences of men are actually concerned in them and conversant about them. How men contract the guilt of sin, what sense they have and ought to have thereof, what danger they are liable unto thereon, what perplexities and distresses their souls and consciences are reduced to thereby, what courses they fix upon for their relief; as also, what is that grace of God whereby alone they may be delivered, wherein it consists, how it was prepared, how purchased, how it is proposed, and how it may be attained; what effects and consequents a participation of it doth produce; how in these things faith and obedience unto God, dependence on him, submission to him, waiting for him, are to be exercised,—is the principal work that those who are called unto the dispensation of the gospel ought to inquire into themselves, and to acquaint others withal. In the right and due management of these things, whether by writing or oral instruction, with prudence, diligence, and zeal, doth consist their principal usefulness in reference unto the glory of God and the everlasting welfare of the

Digitized by Google

souls of men. And they are under a great mistake who suppose it an easy and a common matter to treat of these practical things usefully, to the edification of them that do believe; because both the nature of the things themselves, with the concerns of the souls and consciences of all sorts of persons in them, require that they be handled plainly, and without those intermixtures of secular learning and additions of ornaments of speech which discourses of other natures may or ought to be composed and set off withal. Some, judging by mere outward appearances,—especially if they be of them from whom the true nature of the things themselves treated of are hid,—are ready to despise and scorn the plain management of them, as that which hath nothing of wisdom or learning accompanying of it, no effects of any commendable ability of mind for which it should be esteemed. But it is not expressible how great a mistake such persons, through their own darkness and ignorance, do labour under. In a right spiritual understanding, in a due perception and comprehension of these things,—the things of the sins of men and grace of God,—consists the greatest part of that wisdom, of that soundness of mind, of that knowledge rightly so called, which the gospel commands, exhibits, and puts a valuation upon. To reveal and declare them unto others in words of truth and soberness fit and meet; to express them unto the understandings of men opened and enlightened by the same Spirit by whom the things themselves are originally revealed; to derive such sacred spiritual truths from the word, and by a due preparation to communicate and apply them to the souls and consciences of men,—contains a principal part of that ministerial skill and ability which are required in the dispensers of the gospel, and wherein a severe exercise of sound learning, judgment, and care, is necessary to be found, and may be fully expressed.

Into this treasury, towards the service of the house of God, it is that I have cast my mite in the ensuing exposition and discourses on the 130th Psalm. The design of the Holy Ghost was therein to express and represent, in the person and condition of the psalmist, the case of a soul entangled and ready to be overwhelmed with the guilt of sin, relieved by a discovery of grace and forgiveness in God, with its deportment upon a participation of that relief. After the exposition of the words of the text, my design and endeavour hath been only to enlarge the portraiture here given us in the psalm of a believing soul in and under the condition mentioned; to render the lines of it more visible, and to make the character given in its description more legible; and withal, to give unto others in the like condition with the psalmist a light to understand and discern themselves in that image and representation which is here made of them in the person of another. To this end have I been forced to enlarge on the two great heads of *sin* and *grace*, —especially on the latter, here called the "forgiveness that is with God." An interest herein, a participation hereof, being our principal concernment in this world, and the sole foundation of all our expectations of a blessed portion in that which is to come, it certainly requires the best and utmost of our endeavours, as to look into the nature, causes, and effects of it, so especially into the ways and means whereby we may be made partakers of it, and how that participation may be secured unto us unto our peace and consolation; as also into that love, that holiness, that obedience, that fruitfulness in good works, which, on the account of this grace, God expecteth from us and requireth at our hands. An explication of these things is that which I have designed to ensue and follow after in these discourses, and that with a constant eye, as on the one hand to the sole rule and standard of truth, the sacred Scriptures, especially that part of it which is under peculiar consideration; so, on the other, to the experience and service unto the edification of them that do believe, whose spiritual benefit and advantage, without any other consideration in the world, is aimed at in the publishing of them.

Digitized by Google

AN

EXPOSITION UPON PSALM CXXX.

VERSE 1. Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD.

2. Lord, hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

3. If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

4. But *there is* forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

5. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.

6. My soul *waiteth* for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: *I say, more than* they that watch for the morning.

7. Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD *there is* mercy, and with him *is* plenteous redemption.

8. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

A PARAPHRASE.

Verses 1, 2.—O Lord, through my manifold sins and provocations, I have brought myself into great distresses. Mine iniquities are always before me, and I am ready to be overwhelmed with them, as with a flood of waters; for they have brought me into depths, wherein I am ready to be swallowed up. But yet, although my distress be great and perplexing, I do not, I dare not, utterly despond and cast away all hopes of relief or recovery. Nor do I seek unto any other remedy, way, or means of relief; but I apply myself to thee, Jehovah, to thee alone. And in this my application unto thee, the greatness and urgency of my troubles makes my soul urgent, earnest, and pressing in my supplications. Whilst I have no rest, I can give thee no rest. Oh, therefore, attend and hearken unto the voice of my crying and supplications!

Verse 3.—It is true, O Lord, thou God great and terrible, that if thou shouldst deal with me in this condition, with any man living, with the best of thy saints, according to the strict and exact tenor of the law, which first represents itself to my guilty conscience and

Digitized by Google

troubled soul; if thou shouldst take notice of, observe, and keep in remembrance, mine, or their, or the iniquity of any one, to the end that thou mightst deal with them, and recompense unto them according to the sentence thereof, there would be, neither for me nor them, any the least expectation of deliverance. All flesh must fail before thee, and the spirits which thou hast made, and that to eternity; for who could stand before thee when thou shouldst so execute thy displeasure?

Verse 4.—But, O Lord, this is not absolutely and universally the state of things between thy Majesty and poor sinners; thou art in thy nature infinitely good and gracious, ready and free in the purposes of thy will to receive them. And there is such a blessed way made for the exercise of the holy inclinations and purposes of thy heart towards them, in the mediation and blood of thy dear Son, that they have assured foundations of concluding and believing that there is pardon and forgiveness with thee for them, and which, in the way of thine appointments, they may be partakers of. This way, therefore, will I, with all that fear thee, persist in. I will not give over, leave thee, or turn from thee, through my fears, discouragements, and despondencies; but will abide constantly in the observation of the worship which thou hast prescribed, and the performance of the obedience which thou dost require, having great encouragements so to do.

Verse 5.—And herein, upon the account of the forgiveness that is with thee, O Lord, do I wait with all patience, quietness, and perseverance. In this work is my whole soul engaged, even in an earnest expectation of thy approach unto me in a way of grace and mercy. And for my encouragement therein hast thou given out unto me a blessed word of grace, a faithful word of promise, whereon my hope is fixed.

Verse 6.—Yea, in the performance and discharge of this duty, my soul is intent upon thee, and in its whole frame turned towards thee, and that with such diligence and watchfulness in looking out after every way and means of thy appearance, of the manifestation of thyself, and coming unto me, that I excel therein those who, with longing desire, heedfulness, and earnest expectation, do wait and watch for the appearance of the morning; and that either that they may rest from their night watches, or have light for the duties of thy worship in the temple, which they are most delighted in.

Verses 7, 8.—Herein have I found that rest, peace, and satisfaction unto my own soul, that I cannot but invite and encourage others in the like condition to take the same course with me. Let, then, all the Israel of God, all that fear him, learn this of me, and from my experience. Be not hasty in your distresses, despond not, despair not, turn not aside unto other remedies; but hope in the

Digitized by Google

Lord: for I can now, in an especial manner, give testimony unto this, that there is mercy with him suited unto your relief. Yea, whatever your distress be, the redemption that is with him is so bounteous, plenteous, and unsearchable, that the undoubted issue of your performance of this duty will be, that you shall be delivered from the guilt of all your sins and the perplexities of all your troubles.

GENERAL SCOPE OF THE WHOLE PSALM.

THE design of the Holy Ghost in this psalm is to express, in the *experience* of the psalmist and the working of his faith, the state and condition of a soul greatly in itself perplexed, relieved on the account of grace, and acting itself towards God and his saints suitably to the discovery of that grace unto him;—a great design, and full of great instruction.

And this general prospect gives us the *parts* and scope of the whole psalm; for we have,—

I. *The state and condition of the soul* therein represented, with his deportment in and under that state and condition, in verses 1, 2:—

"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications."

II. *His inquiry after relief.* And therein are two things that present themselves unto him; the one whereof, which first offers the consideration of itself to him in his distress, he *deprecates*, verse 3:—

"If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

The other he *closeth withal*, and finds relief in it and supportment by it, verse 4:—

"But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

Upon this, his discovery and fixing on relief, there is the acting of his faith and the deportment of his whole person:—

1. Towards God, verses 5, 6:—

"I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning."

2. Towards the saints, verses 7, 8:—

"Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

Digitized by Google

All which parts, and the various concernments of them, must be opened severally.

And this also gives an account of what is my design from and upon the words of this psalm,—namely, to declare the perplexed entanglements which may befall a gracious soul, such a one as this psalmist was, with the nature and proper workings of faith in such a condition; principally aiming at what it is that gives a soul relief and supportment in, and afterward deliverance from, such a perplexed estate.

The Lord in mercy dispose of these meditations in such a way and manner as that both he that writes and they that read may be made partakers of the benefit, relief, and consolation intended for his saints in this psalm by the Holy Ghost!

VERSES FIRST AND SECOND.

The state and condition of the soul represented in the psalm—The two first verses opened.

THE state and condition of the soul here represented as the *basis* on which the process of the psalm is built, with its deportment, or the general acting of its faith in that state, is expressed in the two first verses:—

"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications."

I. *The present state of the soul* under consideration is included in that expression, "Out of the depths."

Some of the ancients, as Chrysostom, suppose this expression to relate unto the depths of the *heart* of the psalmist: Τί ἐστιν ἐκ βαθέων not from the mouth or tongue only, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ καρδίας βαθυτάτης,—"but from the depth and bottom of the heart;" ἐξ αὐτῶν τῆς διανοίας τῶν βάθρων, "from the deepest recesses of the mind."

And, indeed, the word is used to express the depths of the hearts of men, but utterly in another sense: Ps. lxiv. 6, "The heart is deep."

But the obvious sense of the place, and the constant use of the word, will not admit of this interpretation: "E profundis;" from עָמַק, "profundus fuit," is מַעֲמַקִּים in the plural number, "profunditates," or "depths." It is commonly used for valleys, or any deep places whatever, but especially of waters. Valleys and deep places, because

Digitized by Google

of their darkness and solitariness, are accounted places of horror, helplessness, and trouble: Ps. xxiii. 4, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death;" that is, in the extremity of danger and trouble.

The moral use of the word, as expressing the state and condition of the souls of men, is metaphorical. These depths, then, are difficulties or pressures, attended with fear, horror, danger, and trouble.

And they are of two sorts:—

1. *Providential*, in respect of outward distresses, calamities, and afflictions: Ps. lxix. 1, 2, "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I stick in the mire of the deep, and there is no standing. I am come, בְּמַעֲמַקֿ־מָיִם, into the depths of waters, and the flood overflows me." It is trouble, and the extremity of it, that the psalmist complains of, and which he thus expresseth. He was brought by it into a condition like unto a man ready to be drowned, being cast into the bottom of deep and miry waters, where he had no firm foundation to stand upon, nor ability to come out; as he farther explains himself, verse 15.

2. There are *internal depths*,—depths of conscience upon the account of sin: Ps. lxxxviii. 6, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps." What he intends by this expression, the psalmist declares in the next words, verse 7, "Thy wrath lieth hard upon me." Sense of God's wrath upon his conscience upon the account of sin, was the deep he was cast into. So, verse 15, speaking of the same matter, saith he, "I suffer thy terrors;" and verse 16, "Thy fierce wrath goeth over me;" which he calls water, waves, and deeps, according to the metaphor before opened.

And these are the deeps that are here principally intended. "Clamat sub molibus et fluctibus iniquitatem suarum," says Austin on the place;—"He cries out under the weight and waves of his sins."

This the ensuing psalm makes evident. Desiring to be delivered from these depths out of which he cried, he deals with God wholly about mercy and forgiveness; and it is sin alone from which forgiveness is a deliverance. The doctrine, also, that he preacheth upon his delivery is that of mercy, grace, and redemption, as is manifest from the close of the psalm; and what we have deliverance by is most upon our hearts when we are delivered.

It is true, indeed, that these deeps do oftentimes concur; as David speaks, "Deep calleth unto deep," Ps. xlii. 7. The deeps of affliction awaken the conscience to a deep sense of sin. But sin is the disease, affliction only a symptom of it: and in attending a cure, the *disease* itself is principally to be heeded; the *symptom* will follow or depart of itself.

Many interpreters think that this was now David's condition. By

Digitized by Google

great trouble and distress he was greatly minded of sin; and we must not, therefore, wholly pass over that intendment of the word, though we are chiefly to respect that which he himself, in this address unto God, did principally regard.

This, in general, is the state and condition of the soul managed in this psalm, and is as the key to the ensuing discourse, or the hinge on which it turns. As to my intendment from the psalm, that which ariseth from hence may be comprised in these two propositions:—

1. *Gracious souls, after much communion with God, may be brought into inextricable depths and entanglements on the account of sin;* for such the psalmist here expresseth his own condition to have been, and such he was.

2. *The inward root of outward distresses is principally to be attended in all pressing trials;—sin, in afflictions.*

Gracious souls may be brought into depths on the account of sin—What those depths are.

BEFORE I proceed at all in the farther opening of the words, they having all of them respect unto the proposition first laid down, I shall explain and confirm the truth contained in it; that so it may be understood what we say, and whereof we do affirm, in the whole process of our discourse.

It is a sad truth that we have proposed unto consideration. He that hears it ought to tremble in himself, that he may rest in the day of trouble. It speaks out the apostle's advice, Rom. xi. 20, "Be not high-minded, but fear;" and that also, 1 Cor. x. 12, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." When Peter had learned this truth by woful experience, after all his boldness and frowardness, he gives this counsel to all saints, "That they would pass the time of their sojourning here in fear," 1 Pet. i. 17; knowing how near, in our greatest peace and serenity, evil and danger may lie at the door.

Some few instances of the many that are left on record, wherein this truth is exemplified, may be mentioned: Gen. vi. 9, "Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God." He did so a long season, and that in an evil time, amidst all sorts of temptations, "when all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth," verse 12. This put an eminency upon his obedience, and doubtless rendered the communion which he had with God, in walking before him, most sweet and precious to him. He was a gracious soul, upon

Digitized by Google

the redoubled testimony of God himself. But we know what befell this holy person. He that shall read the story that is recorded of him, Gen. ix. 20–27, will easily grant that he was brought into inextricable distress on the account of sin. His own drunkenness, verse 21, with the consequent of it, gives scandal unto and provokes the unnatural lust of his son, verse 22; and this leads him to the devoting of that son and his posterity unto destruction, verses 24, 25: all which, joined with the sense of God's just indignation, from whom he had newly received that tremendously miraculous deliverance, must needs overwhelm him with sorrow and anxiety of spirit.

The matter is more clear in David. Under the Old Testament none loved God more than he; none was loved of God more than he. The paths of faith and love wherein he walked are unto the most of us like the way of an eagle in the air,—too high and hard for us. Yet to this very day do the cries of this man after God's own heart sound in our ears. Sometimes he complains of broken bones, sometimes of drowning depths, sometimes of waves and water-spouts, sometimes of wounds and diseases, sometimes of wrath and the sorrows of hell; everywhere of his sins, the burden and trouble of them. Some of the occasions of his depths, darkness, entanglements, and distresses, we all know. As no man had more grace than he, so none is a greater instance of the power of sin, and the effects of its guilt upon the conscience, than he. But instances of this kind are obvious, and occur to the thoughts of all, so that they need not be repeated. I shall, then, show,—

First, What in particular is intended by *the depths and entanglements on the account of sin*, whereinto gracious souls, after much communion with God, may be cast.

Secondly, *Whence it comes to pass that so they may be, and that oftentimes so they are.*

For the first, some or all of these things following do concur to the depths complained of:—

1. *Loss of the wonted sense of the love of God, which the soul did formerly enjoy.* There is a twofold sense of the love of God, whereof believers in this world may be made partakers. There is the *transient acting* of the heart by the Holy Ghost with ravishing, unspeakable joys, in apprehension of God's love, and our relation unto him in Christ. This, or the immediate effect of it, is called "Joy unspeakable and full of glory," 1 Pet. i. 8. The Holy Ghost shining into the heart, with a clear evidence of the soul's interest in all gospel mercies, causeth it to leap for joy, to exult and triumph in the Lord, as being for a season carried above all sense and thought of sin, self-temptation, or trouble. But as God gives the bread of his house unto all his children, so these dainties and high cordials he

Digitized by Google

reserveth only for the seasons and persons wherein and to whom he knows them to be needful and useful. Believers may be without this sense of love, and yet be in no depths. A man may be strong and healthy who hath wholesome food, though he never drinks spirits and cordials.

Again; there is *an abiding, dwelling sense of God's love* upon the hearts of the most of those of whom we speak, who have had long communion with God, consisting in a prevailing gospel persuasion that they are accepted with God in Christ: Rom. v. 1, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." I call it a *prevailing persuasion*, denoting both the *opposition* that is made unto it by Satan and unbelief, and its *efficacy* in the conquest thereof. This is the root from whence all that peace and ordinary consolation, which believers in this world are made partakers of, do spring and grow. This is that which quickens and enlivens them unto duty, Ps. cxvi. 12, 13, and is the salt that renders their sacrifices and performances savoury to God and refreshing to themselves. This supports them under their trials, gives them peace, hope, and comfort in life and death: Ps. xxiii. 4, "Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me." A sense of God's presence in love is sufficient to rebuke all anxiety and fears in the worst and most dreadful condition; and not only so, but to give in the midst of them solid consolation and joy. So the prophet expresseth it, Hab. iii. 17, 18, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation." And this is that sense of love which the choicest believers may lose on the account of sin. This is one step into their depths. They shall not retain any such gospel apprehension of it as that it should give them rest, peace, or consolation,—that it should influence their souls with delight in duty or supportment in trial; and the *nature* hereof will be afterward more fully explained.

2. *Perplexed thoughtfulness about their great and wretched unkindness towards God* is another part of the depths of sin-entangled souls. So David complains: Ps. lxxvii. 3, "I remembered God," saith he, "and was troubled." How comes the remembrance of God to be unto him a matter of trouble? In other places he professeth that it was all his relief and supportment. How comes it to be an occasion of his trouble? All had not been well between God and him; and whereas formerly, in his remembrance of God, his thoughts were chiefly exercised about his love and kindness, now they were wholly possessed with his own sin and unkindness. This causeth

Digitized by Google

his trouble. Herein lies a share of the entanglements occasioned by sin. Saith such a soul in itself, "Foolish creature, hast thou thus requited the Lord? Is this the return that thou hast made unto him for all his love, his kindness, his consolations, mercies? Is this thy kindness for him, thy love to him? Is this thy kindness to thy friend? Is this thy boasting of him, that thou hadst found so much goodness and excellency in him and his love, that though all men should forsake him, thou never wouldst do so? Are all thy promises, all thy engagements which thou madest unto God, in times of distress, upon prevailing obligations, and mighty impressions of his good Spirit upon thy soul, now come to this, that thou shouldst so foolishly forget, neglect, despise, cast him off? Well! now he is gone; he is withdrawn from thee; and what wilt thou do? Art thou not even ashamed to desire him to return?" They were thoughts of this nature that cut Peter to the heart upon his fall. The soul finds them cruel as death, and strong as the grave. It is bound in the chains of them, and cannot be comforted, Ps. xxxviii. 3–6. And herein consists a great part of the depths inquired after: for this consideration excites and puts an edge upon all grieving, straitening, perplexing affections, which are the only means whereby the soul of a man may be inwardly troubled, or trouble itself; such are sorrow and shame, with that self-displicency and revenge wherewith they are attended. And as their reason and object in this case do transcend all other occasions of them, so on no other account do they cause such severe and perplexing reflections on the soul as on this.

3. *A revived sense of justly deserved wrath* belongs also to these depths. This is as the opening of old wounds. When men have passed through a sense of wrath, and have obtained deliverance and rest through the blood of Christ, to come to their old thoughts again, to be trading afresh with hell, curse, law, and wrath, it is a depth indeed. And this often befalls gracious souls on the account of sin: Ps. lxxxviii. 7, "Thy wrath lieth hard upon me," saith Heman. It pressed and crushed him sorely. There is a self-judging as to the desert of wrath, which is consistent with a comforting persuasion of an interest in Christ. This the soul finds sweetness in, as it lies in a subserviency to the exaltation of grace. But in this case, the soul is left under it without that relief. It plungeth itself into the curse of the law and flames of hell, without any cheering supportment from the blood of Christ. This is walking in "the valley of the shadow of death." The soul converseth with death and what seems to lie in a tendency thereunto. The Lord, also, to increase his perplexities, puts new life and spirit into the law,—gives it a fresh commission, as it were, to take such a one into its custody; and the law will never in this world be wanting unto its duty.

Digitized by Google

4. *Oppressing apprehensions of temporal judgments* concur herein also; for God will judge his people. And judgment often begins at the house of God. "Though God," saith such a one, "should not cast me off for ever,—though he should pardon my iniquities; yet he may so take vengeance of my inventions as to make me feed on gall and wormwood all my days." Ps. cxix. 120, saith David, "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments." He knows not what the great God may bring upon him; and being full of a sense of the guilt of sin, which is the bottom of this whole condition, every judgment of God is full of terror unto him. Sometimes he thinks God may *lay open the filth of his heart*, and make him a scandal and a reproach in the world. Ps. xxxix. 8, "O," saith he, "make me not a reproach of the foolish." Sometimes he trembles lest God should strike him suddenly with some *signal judgment*, and take him out of the world in darkness and sorrow: so saith David, "Take me not away in thy wrath." Sometimes he fears lest he shall be like Jonah, and raise a *storm in his family*, in the *church* whereof he is a member, or in the *whole nation:* "Let them not be ashamed for my sake." These things make his heart soft, as Job speaks, and to melt within him. When any affliction or public judgment of God is fastened to a quick, living sense of sin in the conscience, it overwhelms the soul, whether it be only justly feared or be actually inflicted; as was the case of Joseph's brethren in Egypt. The soul is then rolled from one deep to another. Sense of sin casts it on the consideration of its affliction, and affliction turns it back on a sense of sin. So deep calleth unto deep, and all God's billows go over the soul. And they do each of them make the soul tender, and sharpen its sense unto the other. Affliction softens the soul, so that the sense of sin cuts the deeper, and makes the larger wounds; and the sense of sin weakens the soul, and makes affliction sit the heavier, and so increaseth its burden. In this case, that affliction which a man in his usual state of spiritual peace could have embraced as a sweet pledge of love, is as goads and thorns in his side, depriving him of all rest and quietness; God makes it as thorns and briers, wherewith he will teach stubborn souls their duty, as Gideon did the men of Succoth.

5. There may be added hereunto *prevailing fears for a season of being utterly rejected by God, of being found a reprobate at the last day.* Jonah seems to conclude so, chap. ii. 4, "Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight;"—"I am lost for ever, God will own me no more." And Heman, Ps. lxxxviii. 4, 5, "I am counted with them that go down into the pit: free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand." This may reach the soul, until the sorrows of

Digitized by Google

hell encompass it and lay hold upon it; until it be deprived of comfort, peace, rest; until it be a terror to itself, and be ready to choose strangling rather than life. This may befall a gracious soul on the account of sin. But yet because this fights directly against the life of faith, God doth not, unless it be in extraordinary cases, suffer any of his to lie long in this horrible pit, where there is no water, no refreshment. But this often falls out, that even the saints themselves are left for a season to a fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation, as to the prevailing apprehension of their minds. And,—

6. *God secretly sends his arrows into the soul, that wound and gall it, adding pain, trouble, and disquietness to its disconsolation:* Ps. xxxviii. 2, "Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore." Ever and anon in his walking, God shot a sharp piercing arrow, fixing it on his soul, that galled, wounded, and perplexed him, filling him with pain and grievous vexation. These arrows are God's rebukes: Ps. xxxix. 11, "When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity." God speaks in his word, and by his Spirit in the conscience, things sharp and bitter to the soul, fastening them so as it cannot shake them out. These Job so mournfully complains of, chap. vi. 4. The Lord speaks words with that efficacy, that they pierce the heart quite through; and what the issue then is David declares, Ps. xxxviii. 3, "There is no soundness," saith he, "in my flesh because of thine anger; nor is there any rest in my bones because of my sin." The whole person is brought under the power of them, and all health and rest is taken away. And,—

7. *Unspiritedness and disability unto duty,* in doing or suffering, attend such a condition: Ps. xl. 12, "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up." His spiritual strength was worn away by sin, so that he was not able to address himself unto any communion with God. The soul now cannot *pray* with life and power, cannot *hear* with joy and profit, cannot *do good* and communicate with cheerfulness and freedom, cannot *meditate* with delight and heavenly-mindedness, cannot *act for God* with zeal and liberty, cannot think of *suffering* with boldness and resolution; but is *sick*, weak, feeble, and bowed down.

Now, I say, a gracious soul, after much communion with God, may, on the account of sin, by a sense of the guilt of it, be brought into a state and condition wherein some, more, or all of these, with other the like perplexities, may be its portion; and these make up the depths whereof the psalmist here complains. What are the sins, or of what sorts, that ordinarily cast the souls of believers into these depths, shall be afterwards declared.

Digitized by Google

Secondly, I shall now show both *whence it is that believers may fall into such a condition*, as also *whence it is that oftentimes they actually do so.*

Whence it is that believers may be brought into depths on account of sin—Nature of the supplies of grace given in the covenant—How far they extend—Principles of the power of sin.

First, THE *nature of the covenant* wherein all believers now walk with God, and wherein all their whole provision for obedience is inwrapped, leaves it *possible* for them to fall into these depths that have been mentioned. Under the first covenant there was no mercy or forgiveness provided for any sin. It was necessary, then, that it should exhibit a sufficiency of grace to preserve them from every sin, or it could have been of no use at all. This the righteousness of God required, and so it was. To have made a covenant wherein there was no provision at all of pardon, and not a sufficiency of grace to keep the covenanters from need of pardon, was not answerable to the goodness and righteousness of God. But he made man upright, who, of his own accord, sought out many inventions.

It is not so in the covenant of grace; there is in it pardon provided in the blood of Christ: it is not, therefore, of indispensable necessity that there should be administered in it grace effectually preserving from every sin. Yet it is on all accounts to be preferred before the other; for, besides the relief by pardon, which the other knew nothing of, there is in it also much provision against sin, which was not in the other:—

1. There is provision made in it *against all and every sin that would disannul the covenant*, and make a final separation between God and a soul that hath been once taken into the bond thereof. This provision is *absolute*. God hath taken upon himself the making of this good, and the establishing this law of the covenant, that it shall not by any sin be disannulled: Jer. xxxii. 40, "I will," saith God, "make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." The security hereof depends not on any thing in ourselves. All that is in us is to be used as a means of the accomplishment of this promise; but the event or issue depends absolutely on the faithfulness of God. And the whole certainty and stability of the covenant depends on the efficacy of the grace administered in it to preserve men from all such sins as would disannul it.

2. There is in this covenant provision made for *constant peace and*

Digitized by Google

consolation, notwithstanding and against the guilt of such sins as, through their infirmities and temptations, believers are daily exposed unto. Though they fall into *sins* every day, yet they do not fall into *depths* every day. In the tenor of this covenant there is a consistency between a sense of sin unto humiliation and peace, with strong consolation. After the apostle had described the whole conflict that believers have with sin, and the frequent wounds which they receive thereby, which makes them cry out for deliverance, Rom. vii. 24, he yet concludes, chap. viii. 1, that "there is no condemnation unto them;" which is a sufficient and stable foundation of peace. So, 1 John ii. 1, "These things I write unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Our great business and care ought to be, that we sin not; but yet, when we have done our utmost, "if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves," chap. i. 8. What, then, shall poor, sinful, guilty creatures do? Why, let them go to the Father by their advocate, and they shall not fail of pardon and peace. And, saith Paul, Heb. vi. 17, 18, "God is abundantly willing that we might have strong consolation, who fly for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us." What was his condition who fled of old to the city of refuge for safety, from whence this expression is taken? He was guilty of blood, though shed at unawares; and so as that he was to die for it, if he escaped not to the city of refuge. Though we may have the guilt of sins upon us that the law pronounceth death unto, yet, flying to Christ for refuge, God hath provided not only safety, but "strong consolation" for us also. Forgiveness in the blood of Christ doth not only take guilt from the soul, but trouble also from the conscience; and in this respect doth the apostle at large set forth the excellency of his sacrifice, Heb. x. The sacrifices of the old law, he tells us, could not make perfect the worshippers, verse 1: which he proves, verse 2, because they did never take away, thoroughly and really, conscience of sin; that is, depths or distresses of conscience about sin. "But now," saith he, "Jesus Christ, in the covenant of grace, 'hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified,' verse 14; providing for them such stable peace and consolation, as that they shall not need the renewing of sacrifices every day," verse 18. This is the great mystery of the gospel in the blood of Christ, that those who sin every day should have peace with God all their days, provided their sins fall within the compass of those infirmities against which this consolation is provided.

3. There is provision made of grace *to prevent and preserve the soul from great and enormous sins*, such as in their own nature are apt to wound conscience, and cast the person into such depths and

Digitized by Google

entanglements as wherein he shall have neither rest nor peace. Of what sort these sins are shall be afterward declared. There is in this covenant "grace for grace," John i. 16, and abundance of grace administered from the all-fulness of Christ. Grace reigneth in it, Rom. vi. 6, destroying and crucifying "the body of sin."

But this provision in the covenant of grace against peace-ruining, soul-perplexing sins, is not, as to the administration of it, absolute. There are covenant commands and exhortations, on the attendance whereunto the administration of much covenant grace doth depend. To watch, pray, improve faith, to stand on our guard continually, to mortify sin, to fight against temptations, with steadfastness, diligence, constancy, are everywhere prescribed unto us; and that in order unto the insurance of the grace mentioned. These things are on our part the condition of the administration of that abundant grace which is to preserve us from soul-entangling sins. So Peter informs us, 2 Epist. i. 3, "The divine power of God hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness." We have from it an habitual furnishment and provision for obedience at all times. Also, saith he, verse 4, "He hath given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature." What, then, is in this blessed estate and condition required of us, that we may make a due improvement of the provision made for us, and enjoy the comforting influence of those promises that he prescribes unto us? Verses 5–7, "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness charity;" that is, carefully and diligently attend to the exercise of all the graces of the Spirit, and unto a conversation in all things becoming the gospel. What, then, shall be the issue if these things are attended unto? Verse 8, "If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is not enough that these things be in you, that you have the seed and root of them from and by the Holy Ghost; but you are to take care that they flourish and abound: without which, though the root of the matter may be in you, and so you be not wholly devoid of spiritual life, yet you will be poor, barren, sapless, withering creatures all your days. But now, suppose that these things do abound, and we be made fruitful thereby? Why then, saith he, verse 10, "If ye do these things, ye shall never fall." What! never *fall into sin?* Nay, that is not in the promise; and he that says, when he hath done all, "that he hath no sin, he is a liar." Or is it never *fall totally from God?* No; the preservation of the elect, of whom he speaks, from total apostasy, is not suspended on such conditions, especially not

Digitized by Google

on any degree of them, such as their abounding imports. But it is that they shall not fall into their old sins, from which they were purged, verse 9,—such conscience-wasting and defiling sins as they lived in, in the time and state of their unregeneracy. Thus, though there be, in the covenant of grace through Jesus Christ, provision made of abundant supplies for the soul's preservation from entangling sins, yet their administration hath respect unto our diligent attendance unto the means of receiving them appointed for us to walk in.

And here lies the latitude of the new covenant, here lies the exercise of renewed free-will. This is the field of free, voluntary obedience, under the administration of gospel grace. There are extremes which, in respect of the event, it is not concerned in. To be wholly perfect, to be free from every sin, all failings, all infirmities, that is not provided for, not promised in this covenant. It is a covenant of mercy and pardon, which supposeth a continuance of sin. To fall utterly and finally from God, that is absolutely provided against. Between these two extremes of absolute perfection and total apostasy lies the large field of believers' obedience and walking with God. Many a sweet, heavenly passage there is, and many a dangerous depth, in this field. Some walk near to the one side, some to the other; yea, the same person may sometimes press hard after perfection, sometimes be cast to the very border of destruction. Now, between these two lie many a soul-plunging sin, against which no absolute provision is made, and which, for want of giving all diligence to put the means of preservation in practice, believers are oftentimes overtaken withal.

4. There is not in the covenant of grace provision made of *ordinary and abiding consolation* for any under the guilt of great sins, or sins greatly aggravated, which they fall into by a neglect of using and abiding in the fore-mentioned conditions of abounding actual grace. Sins there are which, either because in their own nature they wound and waste conscience, or in their effects break forth into scandal, causing the name of God and the gospel to be evil spoken of, or in some of their circumstances are full of unkindness against God, do deprive the soul of its wonted consolation. How, by what means, on what account, such sins come to terrify conscience, to break the bones, to darken the soul, and to cast it into inextricable depths, notwithstanding the relief that is provided of pardon in the blood of Christ, I shall not now declare; that they will do so, and that consolation is not of equal extent with safety, we know. Hence God assumes it to himself, as an act of mere sovereign grace, to speak peace and refreshment unto the souls of his saints in their depths of sin-entanglements, Isa. lvii. 18, 19. And, indeed, if the Lord had not thus provided that great provocation should stand in need of special reliefs, it might

Digitized by Google

justly be feared that the negligence of believers might possibly bring forth much bitter fruit.

Only, this must be observed by the way, that what is spoken relates to the sense of sinners in their own souls, and not to the nature of the thing itself. There is in the gospel consolation provided against the greatest as well as the least sins. The difference ariseth from God's sovereign communication of it, according to the tenor of the covenant's administration, which we have laid down. Hence, because under Moses' law there was an exception made of some sins, for which there was no sacrifice appointed, so that those who were guilty of them could no way be justified from them,—that is, carnally, as to their interest in the Judaical church and polity,—Paul tells the Jews, Acts xiii. 38, 39, that "through Jesus Christ was preached unto them the forgiveness of sins: and that by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses." There is now no exception of any particular sins as to pardon and peace; but what we have spoken relates unto the manner and way wherein God is pleased to administer consolation to the souls of sinning believers.

And this is the evidence which I shall offer to prove that the souls of believers, after much gracious communion with God, may yet fall into inextricable depths on the account of sin; whence it is that actually they oftentimes do so shall be farther declared.

The principles of this assertion are known, I shall therefore only touch upon them:—

First. The nature of indwelling sin, as it remains in the best of the saints in this life, being a little considered, will evidence unto us from whence it is that they are sometimes surprised and plunged into the depths mentioned; for,—

1. Though *the strength of every sin* be weakened by grace, yet *the root of no sin* is in this life wholly taken away. Lust is like the stubborn Canaanites, who, after the general conquest of the land, would dwell in it still, Josh. xvii. 12. Indeed, when Israel grew strong they brought them under tribute, but they could not utterly expel them. The kingdom and rule belongs to grace; and when it grows strong it brings sin much under, but it will not wholly be driven out. The body of death is not utterly to be done away, but in and by the death of the body. In the flesh of the best saints there "dwelleth no good thing," Rom. vii. 18; but the contrary is there,—that is, the root of all evil: "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit," as "the Spirit lusteth against the flesh," Gal. v. 17. As, then, there is a universality in the actings of the Spirit in its opposing all evil, so also there is a universality in the actings of the flesh for the furtherance of it.

Digitized by Google

2. *Some lusts* or branches of original corruption do obtain in some persons such advantages, either from nature, custom, employment, society, or the like circumstances, that they become *like the Canaanites that had iron chariots;* it is a very difficult thing to subdue them. Well it is if war be maintained constantly against them, for they will almost always be in actual rebellion.

3. Indwelling sin though weakened *retaineth all its properties.* The properties of a thing follow its nature. Where the nature of any thing is, there are all its natural properties. What are these properties of indwelling sin I should here declare, but that I have handled the whole power and efficacy, the nature and properties of it, in a treatise to that only purpose. In brief, they are such as it is no wonder that some believers are by them cast into depths; but it is indeed that they do escape them. But thereof the reader may see at large my discourse on this particular subject.[1]

Secondly. Add hereunto *the power and prevalency of temptation;* which, because also I have already, in a special discourse to that purpose,[2] insisted on, I shall not here farther lay open.

Thirdly. The *sovereign pleasure of God* in dealing with sinning saints must also be considered. Divine love and wisdom work not towards all in the same manner. God is pleased to continue peace unto some with a "non-obstante," for great provocations. Love shall humble them, and rebukes of kindness shall recover them from their wanderings. Others he is pleased to bring into the depths we have been speaking of. But yet I may say generally, signal provocations meet with one of these two events from God:—First, Those in whom they are are left into some *signal barrenness* and fruitlessness in their generations; they shall wither, grow barren, worldly, sapless, and be much cast out of the hearts of the people of God. Or, secondly, They shall be exercised in these depths, from whence their way of deliverance is laid down in this psalm. Thus, I say, God deals with his saints in great variety; some shall have all their bones broken, when others shall have only the gentle strokes of the rod. We are in the hand of mercy, and he may deal with us as seems good unto him; but for our parts, great sins ought to be attended with expectations of great depths and perplexities.

And this is the state of the soul proposed in this psalm, and by us, unto consideration. These are the depths wherein it is entangled; these are the ways and means whereby it is brought into these depths. Its deportment in and under this state and condition lies next in our way. But before I proceed thereunto, I shall annex some few things unto what hath been delivered, tending to the farther open-

[1] See previous treatise in this volume, p. 153.
[2] See also this volume, p. 87.

Digitized by Google

ing of the whole case before us. And they are,—1. What are, or of what sort those sins are, which usually cast the souls of believers into these depths; and then, 2. Insist on some aggravations of them.

What sins usually bring believers into great spiritual distresses—Aggravations of these sins.

First, SINS in their own nature *wasting conscience* are of this sort; sins that rise in opposition unto all of God that is in us; that is, the light of grace and nature also. Such are the sins that cast David into his depths; such are the sins enumerated, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. "Be not deceived," saith the apostle: "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." Certain it is that believers may fall into some of the sins here mentioned. Some have done so, as is left on record. The apostle says not those who have committed any of these sins, but *such sinners*, shall not inherit the kingdom of God; that is, who live in these sins, or any like unto them. There is no provision of mercy made for *such sinners*. These and the like are sins which in their own nature, without the consideration of aggravating circumstances (which yet, indeed, really in believers they can never be without), are able to plunge a soul into depths. These sins cut the locks of men's spiritual strength; and it is in vain for them to say, "We will go, and do as at other times." Bones are not broken without pain; nor great sins brought on the conscience without trouble. But I need not insist on these. Some say that they deprive even true believers of all their interest in the love of God, but unduly; all grant that they bereave them of all comforting evidence and well-grounded assurance of it. So they did David and Peter. And herein lies no small part of the depths we are searching into.

Secondly. There are sins which, though they do not rise up in the conscience with such a bloody guilt as those mentioned, yet, *by reason of some circumstances and aggravations*, God takes them so unkindly as to make them a root of disquietness and trouble to the soul all its days. He says of some sins of ungodly men, "As I live, this iniquity shall not be purged from you until ye die. If you are come to this height, you shall not escape. I will not spare you." And there are provocations in his own people which may be so circumstantiated as that he will not let them pass before he have cast them

Digitized by Google

into depths, and made them cry out for deliverance. Let us consider some of them:—

1. *Miscarriages under signal enjoyments of love and kindness from God* are of this sort. When God hath given unto any one expressive manifestations of his love, convinced him of it, made him say in the inmost parts of his heart, "This is undeserved love and kindness;"—then for him to be negligent in his walking with God, it carrieth an unkindness with it that shall not be forgotten. It is a remark upon the miscarriages of Solomon, that he fell into them after God had "appeared unto him twice." And all sins under or after especial mercies will meet, at one time or other, especial rebukes. Nothing doth more distress the conscience of a sinner than the remembrance, in darkness, of abused light; in desertions, of neglected love. This God will make them sensible of. "Though I have redeemed them," saith God, "yet they have spoken lies against me," Hos. vii. 13: so chap. xiii. 4–7. When God hath in his providence dealt graciously with a person,—it may be delivered him from straits and troubles, set him in a large place, prevented him with many fruits and effects of his goodness, blessed him in his person, relations, and employments, dealt well with his soul, in giving him a gracious sense of his love in Christ;—for such a one to fall under sinful miscarriages, it goes to the heart of God, and shall not be passed over: *Undervaluations of love are great provocations.* "Hath Nabal thus requited my kindness?" saith David. "I cannot bear it." And the clearer the convictions of any in this kind were, the more severe will their reflections be upon themselves.

2. *Sins under or after great afflictions are of this importance also.* God doth not afflict willingly, or chasten us merely for his pleasure; he doth it to make us partakers of his holiness. To take so little notice of his hand herein, as under it or after it not to watch against the workings and surprisals of sin, it hath unkindness in it: "I smote him," saith God, "and he went on frowardly in the way of his own heart." These provocations of his sons and daughters he cannot bear with. Hath God brought thee into the furnace, so that thou hast melted under his hand, and in pity and compassion hath given thee enlargement?—if thou hast soon forgotten his dealings with thee, is it any wonder if he mind thee again by troubles in thy soul?

3. *Breaking off from under strong convictions and dawnings of love before conversion,* are oftentimes remembered upon the conscience afterward. When the Lord by his Spirit shall mightily convince the heart of sin, and make withal some discoveries of his love and the excellencies of Christ unto it, so that it begins to yield and be overpowered, being almost persuaded to be a Christian;—if, then,

Digitized by Google

through the strength of lust or unbelief, it goes back to the world or self-righteousness, its folly hath unkindness with it that sometimes shall not be passed by. God can, and often doth, put forth the greatness of his power for the recovery of such a soul; but yet he will deal with him about this contempt of his love and the excellency of his Son, in the dawnings of them revealed unto him.

4. *Sudden forgetfulness of endearing manifestations of special love.* This God cautions his people against, as knowing their proneness thereunto: Ps. lxxxv. 8, "God the LORD will speak peace to his people, and to his saints; but let them not turn again to folly." Let them take heed of their aptness to forget endearing manifestations of special love. When God at any time draws nigh to a soul by his Spirit, in his word, with gracious words of peace and love, giving a sense of his kindness upon the heart by the Holy Ghost, so that it is filled with joy unspeakable and glorious thereon;—for this soul, upon a temptation, a diversion, or by mere carelessness and neglect, which oftentimes falls out, to suffer this sense of love to be as it were obliterated, and so to lose that influencing efficacy unto obedience which it is accompanied withal, this also is full of unkindness. An account hereof we have, Cant. v. 1–6. In the first verse the Lord Jesus draws nigh, with full provision of gospel mercies for his beloved: "I am come unto thee," saith he, "O my sister. I have brought myrrh and spice, honey and wine, with me: whatever is spiritually sweet and delightful,—mercy, grace, peace, consolation, joy, assurance,—they are all here in readiness for thee." Verse 2. The spouse, in her drowsy indisposition, takes little notice of this gracious visit; she is diverted by other matters, and knows not how to attend fully and wholly to the blessed communion offered unto her, but excuseth herself as otherwise engaged. But what is the issue? Christ withdraws, leaves her in the dark, in the midst of many disconsolations, and long it is before she obtain any recovery.

5. *Great opportunities for service neglected and great gifts not improved* are oftentimes the occasion of plunging the soul into great depths. Gifts are given to trade withal for God. Opportunities are the market-days for that trade. To napkin up the one and to let slip the other will end in trouble and disconsolation. Disquietments and perplexities of heart are worms that will certainly breed in the rust of unexercised gifts. God loseth a revenue of glory and honour by such slothful souls; and he will make them sensible of it. I know some at this day whom omissions of opportunities for service are ready to sink into the grave.

6. *Sins after especial warnings* are usually thus issued. In all that variety of special warnings which God is pleased to use towards sinning saints, I shall single out one only:—When a soul is wrest-

Digitized by Google

ling with some lust or temptation, God by his providence causeth some special word, in the preaching of the gospel, or the administration of some ordinance thereof, peculiarly suited to the state and condition of the soul, by the ways of rebuke or persuasion, to come nigh and enter the inmost parts of the heart. The soul cannot but take notice that God is nigh to him, that he is dealing with him, and calling on him to look to him for assistance. And he seldom gives such warnings to his saints but that he is nigh them in an eminent manner to give them relief and help, if, in answer unto his call, they apply themselves unto him; but if his care and kindness herein be neglected, his following reproofs are usually more severe.

7. *Sins that bring scandal* seldom suffer the soul to escape depths. Even in great sins, God in chastening takes more notice ofttimes of the scandal than the sin; as 2 Sam. xii. 14. Many professors take little notice of their worldliness, their pride, their passion, their lavish tongues; but the world doth, and the gospel is disadvantaged by it: and no wonder if themselves find from the hand of the Lord the bitter fruits of them in the issue.

And many other such aggravations of sins there are, which heighten provocations in their own nature not of so dreadful an aspect as some others, into a guilt plunging a soul into depths. Those which have been named may suffice in the way of instance; which is all that we have aimed at, and therefore forbear enlargements on the several heads of them.

The consideration of some aggravations of the guilt of these sins, which bring the soul usually into the condition before laid down, shall close this discourse:—

1. *The soul is furnished with a principle of grace, which is continually operative and working for its preservation from such sins.* The new creature is living and active for its own growth, increase, and security, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace: Gal. v. 17, it "lusteth against the flesh." It is naturally active for its own preservation and increase, as new-born children have a natural inclination to the food that will keep them alive and cause them to grow, 1 Pet. ii. 2. The soul, then, cannot fall into these entangling sins, but it must be with a high neglect of that very principle which is bestowed upon it for quite contrary ends and purposes. The labourings, lustings, desires, crying of it are neglected. Now, it is from God, and is the renovation of his image in us,—that which God owneth and careth for. The wounding of its vitals, the stifling its operations, the neglect of its endeavours for the soul's preservation, do always attend sins of the importance spoken unto.

2. Whereas this new creature, this principle of life and obedience, is not able of itself to preserve the soul from such sins as will bring

Digitized by Google

it into depths, *there is full provision for continual supplies made for it and all its wants in Jesus Christ.* There are treasures of relief in Christ, whereunto the soul may at any time repair and find succour against the incursions of sin. He says to the soul, as David unto Abiathar, when he fled from Doeg, "Abide thou with me, fear not: for he that seeketh my life, seeketh thy life; but with me thou shalt be in safe-guard;"—"Sin is my enemy no less than thine; it seeketh the life of thy soul, and it seeketh my life. 'Abide with me, for with me thou shalt be in safety.'" This the apostle exhorts us unto, Heb. iv. 16, "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." If ever it be a time of need with a soul, it is so when it is under the assaults of provoking sins. At such a time, there is suitable and seasonable help in Christ for succour and relief. The new creature begs, with sighs and groans, that the soul would apply itself unto him. To neglect him with all his provision of grace, whilst he stands calling unto us, "Open unto me, for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night;" to despise the sighing of the poor prisoner, the new creature, by sin appointed to die, cannot but be a high provocation. May not God complain and say, "See these poor creatures. They were once intrusted with a stock of grace in themselves; this they cast away, and themselves into the utmost misery thereby. That they might not utterly perish a second time, their portion and stock is now laid up in another,—a safe treasurer; in him are their lives and comforts secured. But see their wretched negligence; they venture all rather than they will attend to him for succour." And what think we is the heart of Christ when he sees his children giving way to conscience-wasting sins, without that application unto him which the life and peace of their own souls calls upon them for? These are not sins of daily infirmity, which cannot be avoided; but their guilt is always attended with a neglect more or less of the relief provided in Christ against them. The means of preservation from them is blessed, ready, nigh at hand; the concernment of Christ in our preservation great, of our souls unspeakable. To neglect and despise means, Christ, souls, peace, and life, must needs render guilt very guilty.

3. Much to the same purpose may be spoken about that *signal provision that is made against such sins as these in the covenant of grace*, as hath been already declared; but I shall not farther carry on this discourse.

And this may suffice as to the state and condition of the soul in this psalm represented. We have seen what the depths are wherein it is entangled, and by what ways and means any one may come to be cast into them. The next thing that offers itself unto our con-

Digitized by Google

sideration is the deportment of a gracious soul in that state or condition, or what course it steers towards a delivery.

The duty and actings of a believer under distresses from a sense of sin—His application unto God, to God alone—Earnestness and intension of mind therein.

II. THE words of these two first verses declare also *the deportment of the soul in the condition that we have described;* that is, what it doth, and what course it steers for relief. "I have cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications."

There is in the words a general application made in a tendency unto relief; wherein is first to be considered to whom the application is made; and that is Jehovah: "I have cried unto thee, Jehovah." God gave out that name to his people to confirm their faith in the stability of his promises, Exod. iii. He who is. Being himself will assuredly give being and subsistence to his promises. Being to deal with God about the promises of grace, he makes his application to him under this name: I call upon thee, Jehovah.

In the application itself may be observed,—First, The *anthropopathy* of the expression. He prays that God would cause his ears to be attentive; after the manner of men who seriously attend to what is spoken to them, when they turn aside from that which they regard not. Secondly, The earnestness of the soul in the work it hath in hand; which is evident both from the reduplication of his request, "Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications;" and the emphaticalness of the words he maketh use of: "Let thine ears," saith he, "be קַשֻּׁבוֹת,—diligently attentive." The word signifies the most diligent heedfulness and close attention: "Let thine ears be very attentive." And unto what? לְקוֹל תַּחֲנוּנָי,—"To the voice of my supplications." "Deprecationum mearum," generally say interpreters;—"Of my deprecations," or earnest prayers for the averting of evil or punishment. But the word is from חָנַן, "Gratiosus fuit," to be gracious or merciful; so that it signifies properly supplication for grace. "Be attentive," saith he, "O Lord, unto my supplications for grace and mercy, which, according to my extreme necessity, I now address myself to make unto thee." And in these words doth the psalmist set forth in general the frame and working of a gracious soul being cast into depths and darkness by sin.

The foundation of what I shall farther thence pursue lies in these two propositions:—

Digitized by Google

First, *The only attempt of a sinful, entangled soul for relief lies in an application to God alone:* "To thee, Jehovah, have I cried; Lord, hear."

Secondly, *Depths of sin-entanglements will put a gracious soul on intense and earnest applications unto God:* "Lord, hear; Lord, attend." Dying men do not use to cry out slothfully for relief.

What may be thought necessary in general for the direction of a soul in the state and condition described, shall briefly be spoken unto from these two propositions:—

1. *Trouble, danger, disquietment, arguing not only things evil, but a sense in the mind and soul of them, will of themselves put those in whom they are upon seeking relief.* Every thing would naturally be at rest. A drowning man needs no exhortation to endeavour his own deliverance and safety; and spiritual troubles will, in like manner, put men on attempts for relief. To seek for no remedy is to be senselessly obdurate, or wretchedly desperate, as Cain and Judas. We may suppose, then, that the principal business of every soul in depths is to endeavour deliverance. They cannot rest in that condition wherein they have no rest. In this endeavour, what course a gracious soul steers is laid down in the first proposition, negatively and positively. He applies himself not to any thing but God; he applies himself unto God. An eminent instance we have of it in both parts, or both to the one side and the other, Hos. xiv. 3, "Asshur," say those poor, distressed, returning sinners, "shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Their application unto God is attended with a renunciation of every other way of relief.

Several things there are that sinners are apt to apply themselves unto for relief in their perplexities, which prove unto them as waters that fail. How many things have the Romanists invented to deceive souls withal! Saints and angels, the blessed Virgin, the wood of the cross, confessions, penances, masses, pilgrimages, dirges, purgatories, papal pardons, works of compensation, and the like, are made entrances for innumerable souls into everlasting ruin. Did they know the terror of the Lord, the nature of sin, and of the mediation of Christ, they would be ashamed and confounded in themselves for these abominations; they would not say unto these their idols, "Ye are our gods; come and save us." How short do all their contrivances come of his that would fain be offering "rivers of oil, yea, the fruit of his body, for the sin of his soul, his first-born for his transgression," Micah vi. 7, who yet gains nothing but an aggravation of his sin and misery thereby! yea, the heathens went beyond them in devotion and expense. It is no new inquiry, what course sin-perplexed souls should

Digitized by Google

take for relief. From the foundation of the world, the minds of far the greatest part of mankind have been exercised in it. As was their light or darkness, such was the course they took. Among those who were ignorant of God, this inquiry brought forth all that diabolical superstition which spread itself over the face of the whole world. Gentilism being destroyed by the power and efficacy of the gospel, the same inquiry working in the minds of darkened men, in conjunction with other lusts, brought forth the Papacy. When men had lost a spiritual acquaintance with the covenant of grace and mystery of the gospel, the design of eternal love, and efficacy of the blood of Christ, they betook themselves, in part or in whole, for relief under their entanglements, unto the broken cisterns mentioned. They are of two sorts,—self, and other things. For those other things which belong unto their false worship, being abominated by all the saints of God, I shall not need to make any farther mention of them. That which relates unto self is not confined unto Popery, but confines itself to the limits of human nature, and is predominate over all that are under the law; that is, to seek for relief in sin-distresses by self-endeavours, self-righteousness. Hence many poor souls in straits apply themselves to themselves. They expect their cure from the same hand that wounded them. This was the life of Judaism, as the apostle informs us, Rom. x. 3. And all men under the law are still animated by the same principle. They return, but not unto the Lord. Finding themselves in depths, in distresses about sin, what course do they take? This they will do, that they will do no more; this shall be their ordinary course, and that they will do in an extraordinary manner; as they have offended, whence their trouble ariseth, so they will amend, and look that their peace should spring from thence, as if God and they stood on equal terms. In this way some spend all their days; sinning and amending, amending and sinning, without once coming to repentance and peace. This the souls of believers watch against. They look on themselves as fatherless: "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy;" that is, helpless,—without the least ground of hopes in themselves or expectation from themselves. They know their repentance, their amendment, their supplications, their humiliations, their fastings, their mortifications, will not relieve them. Repent they will, and amend they will, and pray, and fast, and humble their souls, for they know these things to be their duty; but they know that their goodness extends not to Him with whom they have to do, nor is He profited by their righteousness. They will be in the performance of all duties; but they expect not deliverance by any duty. "It is God," say they, "with whom we have to do: our business is to hearken what he will say unto us."

There are also other ways whereby sinful souls destroy themselves

Digitized by Google

by false reliefs. Diversions from their perplexing thoughtfulness please them. They will fix on something or other that cannot cure their disease, but shall only make them forget that they are sick; as Cain, under the terror of his guilt, departed from the presence of the Lord, and sought inward rest in outward labour and employment. He went and built a city, Gen. iv. 17. Such courses Saul fixed on; first music, then a witch. Nothing more ordinary than for men thus to deal with their convictions. They see their sickness, feel their wound, and go to the Assyrian, Hos. v. 13. And this insensibly leads men into atheism. Frequent applications of creature-diversions unto convictions of sin are a notable means of bringing on final impenitency. Some drunkards had, it may be, never been so, had they not been first convinced of other sins. They strive to stifle the guilt of one sin with another. They fly from themselves unto themselves, from their consciences unto their lusts, and seek for relief from sin by sinning. This is so far from believers, that they will not allow lawful things to be a diversion of their distress. Use lawful things they may and will, but not to divert their thoughts from their distresses. These they know must be issued between God and them. Wear off they will not, but must be taken away. These rocks, and the like, whereof there are innumerable, I say, a gracious soul takes care to avoid. He knows it is God alone who is the Lord of his conscience, where his depths lie; God alone against whom he hath sinned; God alone who can pardon his sin. From dealing with him he will be neither enticed nor diverted. "To thee, O Lord," saith he, "do I come; thy word concerning me must stand; upon thee will I wait. If thou hast no delight in me, I must perish. Other remedies I know are vain. I intend not to spend my strength for that which is not bread. Unto thee do I cry." Here a sin-entangled soul is to fix itself. Trouble excites it to look for relief. Many things without it present themselves as a diversion; many things within it offer themselves for a remedy. "Forget thy sorrow," say the former; "Ease thyself of it by us," say the latter. The soul refuseth both, as physicians of no value, and to God alone makes its application. He hath wounded, and he alone can heal. And until any one that is sensible of the guilt of sin will come off from all reserves to deal immediately with God, it is in vain for him to expect relief.

2. *Herein it is intense, earnest, and urgent;* which was the second thing observed. It is no time now to be slothful. The soul's all, its greatest concernments are at the stake. Dull, cold, formal, customary applications to God will not serve the turn. Ordinary actings of faith, love, fervency; usual seasons, opportunities, duties, answer not this condition. To do no more than ordinary now is to do nothing at all. He that puts forth no more strength and activity for his de-

Digitized by Google

liverance when he is in depths, ready to perish, than he doth, or hath need to do, when he is at liberty in plain and smooth paths, is scarcely like to escape. Some in such conditions are careless and negligent; they think, in ordinary course, to wear off their distempers; and that, although at present they are sensible of their danger, they shall yet have peace at last: in which frame there is much contempt of God. Some despond and languish away under their pressures. Spiritual sloth influenceth both these sorts of persons. Let us see the frame under consideration exemplified in another. We have an instance in the spouse, Cant. iii. 1–3. She had lost the presence of Christ, and so was in the very state and condition before described, verse 1. It was night with her,—a time of darkness and disconsolation; and she seeks for her beloved: "By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth." Christ was absent from her, and she was left unto depths and darkness upon that account; wherefore she seeks for him. But, as the most are apt to do in the like state and condition, she mends not her pace, goes not out of or beyond her course of ordinary duties, nor the frame she was usually in at other times. But what is the issue? Saith she, "I found him not." This is not a way to recover a sense of lost love, nor to get out of her entanglements. And this puts her on another course; she begins to think that if things continue in this estate she shall be undone. "I go on, indeed, with the performance of duties still; but I have not the presence of my beloved,—I meet not with Christ in them. My darkness and trouble abides still. If I take not some other course, I shall be lost." Well, saith she, "I will rise now," verse 2;—"I will shake off all that ease, and sloth, and customariness, that cleave to me." Some more lively, vigorous course must be fixed on. Resolutions for new, extraordinary, vigorous, constant applications unto God, are the first general step and degree of a sin-entangled soul acting towards a recovery. "I will rise now." And what doth she do when she is thus resolved? "I will," saith she, "go about the streets, and in the broad ways, and seek him whom my soul loveth;"—"I will leave no ways or means unattempted whereby I may possibly come to a fresh enjoyment of him. If a man seek for a friend, he can look for him only in the streets, and in the broad ways,—that is, either in towns, or in the fields. So will I do," saith the spouse. "In what way, ordinance, or institution soever, in or by what duty soever, public or private, of communion with others or solitary retiredness, Christ ever was or may be found, or peace obtained, 'I will seek him,' and not give over until I come to an enjoyment of him." And this frame, this resolution, a soul in depths must come unto, if ever it expect deliverance. For the most part, men's "wounds stink, and are corrupt, because of their foolishness," as the psalmist complains, Ps. xxxviii. 5.

Digitized by Google

They are wounded by sin, and through spiritual sloth they neglect their cure; this weakens them, and disquiets them day by day: yet they endure all, rather than they will come out of their carnal ease, to deal effectually with God in an extraordinary manner. It was otherwise with David: Ps. xxii. 1, 2, "Why," saith he, "art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the day-time, and in the night season, and am not silent." What ails the man? Can he not be quiet night nor day? never silent, never hold his peace? And if he be somewhat disquieted, can he not contain himself, but that he must roar and cry out? Yea, must he "roar" thus "all the day long," as he speaks, Ps. xxxii. 3, and "groan all the night," as Ps. vi. 6? What is the matter, with all this roaring, sighing, tears, roaring all the day, all night long? Ah! let him alone, his soul is bitter in him; he is fallen into depths; the Lord is withdrawn from him; trouble is hard at hand; yea, he is full of anxiety on the account of sin; there is no quietness and soundness in him; and he must thus earnestly and restlessly apply himself for relief. Alas! what strangers, for the most part, are men now-a-days to this frame! How little of the workings of this spirit is found amongst us! And is not the reason of it, that we value the world more, and heaven and heavenly things less, than he did? that we can live at a better rate, without a sense of the love of God in Christ, than he could do? And is it not hence that we every day see so many withering professors, that have in a manner lost all communion with God, beyond a little lip-labour or talking; the filthy savour of whose wounds are offensive to all but themselves? And so will they go on, ready to die and perish, rather than with this holy man thus stir up themselves to meet the Lord. Heman was also like unto him, Ps. lxxxviii. 11, 12. What sense he had of his depths he declares, verse 3: "My soul," saith he, "is full of troubles; and my life draweth nigh unto the grave." And what course doth he steer in this heavy, sorrowful, and disconsolate condition? Why, saith he, "O LORD God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee: let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry," verses 1, 2. Day and night he cries to the God of his salvation, and that with earnestness and importunity. This was his business, this was he exercised about all his days.

This is that which is aimed at:—If a gracious soul be brought into the depths before mentioned and described, by reason of sin, when the Lord is pleased to lead him forth towards a recovery, he causeth him to be vigorous and restless in all the duties whereby he may make application to him for deliverance. Now, wherein this intenseness and earnestness of the soul, in its applications unto God, doth principally consist I shall briefly declare, when I have touched a little upon some considerations and grounds that stir it up thereunto:—

Digitized by Google

(1.) *The greatest of men's concernments* may well put them on this earnestness. Men do not use to deal with dull and slothful spirits about their greatest concerns. David tells us that he was more concerned in the "light of God's countenance" than the men of the world could be in their "corn and wine," Ps. iv. 6, 7. Suppose a man of the world should have his house, wherein all his stock and riches are laid up, set on fire, and so the whole be in danger under his eye to be consumed, would he be calm and quiet in the consideration of it? Would he not bestir himself with all his might, and call in all the help he could obtain? and that because his portion, his all, his great concernment, lies at stake. And shall the soul be slothful, careless, dull, secure, when fire is put to its eternal concernments,—when the light of God's countenance, which is of more esteem unto him than the greatest increase of corn and wine can be to the men of the world, is removed from him? It was an argument of prodigious security in Jonah, that he was fast asleep when the ship wherein he was was ready to be cast away for his sake. And will it be thought less in any soul, who, being in a storm of wrath and displeasure from God, sent out into the deep after him, shall neglect it, and sleep, as Solomon says, "on the top of a mast in the midst of the sea?" How did that poor creature, whose heart was mad on his idols, Judges xviii. 24, cry out when he was deprived of them! "Ye have taken away my gods," saith he, "and what have I more?" And shall a gracious soul lose his God through his own folly,—the sense of his love, the consolation of his presence,—and not with all his might follow hard after him? Peace with God, joy in believing, such souls have formerly obtained. Can they live without them now in their ordinary walking? Can they choose but cry out with Job, "Oh that it were with us as in former days, when the candle of the Lord was upon our tabernacle?" chap. xxix. 2–4; and with David, "O God, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation," Ps. li. 12, "for O my God, I remember former enjoyments, and my soul is cast down within me?" Ps. xlii. 6. They cannot live without it. But suppose they might make a sorry shift to pass on in their pilgrimage whilst all is smooth about them, what will they do in the time of outward trials and distresses, when deep calleth unto deep, and one trouble excites and sharpens another? Nothing then will support them, they know, but that which is wanting to them; as Hab. iii. 17, 18, Ps. xxiii. 4: so that the greatness of their concernment provokes them to the earnestness mentioned.

(2.) They have a deep sense of these their great concernments. All men are equally concerned in the love of God and pardon of sin. Every one hath a soul of the same immortal constitution, equally capable of bliss and woe. But yet we see most men are so stupidly

Digitized by Google

sottish, that they take little notice of these things. Neither the guilt of sin, nor the wrath of God, nor death, nor hell, are thought on or esteemed by them; they are their concernments, but they are not sensible of them. But gracious souls have a quick, living sense of spiritual things; for,—

[1.] They have a *saving spiritual light*, whereby they are able to discern the true nature of sin and the terror of the Lord: for though they are now supposed to have lost the comforting light of the Spirit, yet they never lose the sanctifying light of the Spirit, the light whereby they are enabled to discern spiritual things in a spiritual manner; this never utterly departs from them. By this they see sin to be "exceeding sinful," Rom. vii. 13. By this they know "the terror of the Lord," 2 Cor. v. 11; and that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," Heb. x. 31. By this they discover the excellency of the love of God in Christ, which passeth knowledge, the present sense whereof they have lost. By this they are enabled to look within the vail, and to take a view of the blessed consolations which the saints enjoy whose communion with God was never interrupted. This represents to them all the sweetness, pleasure, joy, peace, which in former days they had, whilst God was present with them in love. By this are they taught to value all the fruits of the blood of Jesus Christ, of the enjoyment of many whereof they are at present cut short and deprived. All which, with other things of the like nature and importance, make them very sensible of their concernments.

[2.] They remember what it *cost them formerly* to deal with God about sin; and hence they know it is no ordinary matter they have in hand. They must again to their old work, take the old cup into their hands again. A recovery from depths is as a new conversion.

Ofttimes in it the whole work, as to the soul's apprehension, is gone over afresh. This the soul knows to have been a work of dread, terror, and trouble, and trembles in itself at its new trials. And,—

[3.] The Holy Ghost gives unto poor souls a fresh sense of their deep concernments, on purpose that it may be a means to stir them up unto these earnest applications unto God. The whole work is his, and he carries it on by means suited to the compassing of the end he aimeth at; and by these means is a gracious soul brought into the frame mentioned. Now, there are sundry things that concur in and unto this frame:—

1*st.* There is a *continual thoughtfulness* about the sad condition wherein the soul is in its depths. Being deeply affected with their condition, they are continually ruminating upon it, and pondering it in their minds. So David declares the case to have been with him: Ps. xxxviii. 2–6, 8, "Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand

Digitized by Google

presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart." Restlessness, deep thoughtfulness, disquietness of heart, continual heaviness of soul, sorrow and anxiety of mind, lie at the bottom of the applications we speak of. From these principles their prayers flow out; as David adds, verse 9, "Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee." This way all his trouble wrought. He *prayed* out of the abundance of his meditation and grief. Thoughts of their state and condition lie down with such persons, and rise with them, and accompany them all the day long. As Reuben cried, "The child is not; and I, whither shall I go?" so doth such a soul;—"The love of God is not, Christ is not; and I, whither shall I cause my sorrow to go? God is provoked, death is nigh at hand, relief is far away, darkness is about me. I have lost my peace, my joy, my song in the night. What do I think of duties? Can two walk together unless they be agreed? Can I walk with God in them, whilst I have thus made him mine enemy? What do I think of ordinances? Will it do me any good to be at Jerusalem, and not see the face of the King? to live under ordinances, and not to meet in them with the King of saints? May I not justly fear that the Lord will take his Holy Spirit from me until I be left without remedy?" With such thoughts as these are sin-entangled souls exercised, and they lie rolling in their minds in all their applications unto God.

2*dly*. We see the application itself consists in and is made by *the prayer of faith*, or crying unto God. Now, this is done with intenseness of mind; which hath a twofold fruit or propriety,—(1*st*.) Importunity; and, (2*dly*.) Constancy.

It is said of our blessed Saviour, that when he was in his depths about our sins, "he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong cries and tears," Heb. v. 7. "Strong cries and tears" express the utmost intension of spirit. And David expresseth it by "roaring," as we have seen before; as also by "sighing, groaning, and panting." A soul in such a condition lies down before the Lord with sighs, groans, mourning, cries, tears, and roaring, according to the various working of his heart, and its being affected with the things that it hath to do; and this produceth,—

(1*st*.) *Importunity*. The power of the importunity of faith our Saviour hath marvellously set out, Luke xi. 5–10, as also, chap.

Digitized by Google

xviii. 1. Importunate prayer is certainly prevailing; and importunity is, as it were, made up of these two things,—*frequency* of interposition and *variety* of arguings. You shall have a man that is importunate come unto you seven times a-day about the same business; and after all, if any new thought come into his mind, though he had resolved to the contrary, he will come again. And there is nothing that can be imagined to relate unto the business he hath in hand but he will make use of it, and turn it to the furtherance of his plea. So is it in this case. Men will use both frequency of interposition and variety of arguings: Ps. lxxxvi. 3, "I cry unto thee daily," or rather, all the day. He had but that *one business*, and he attended it to the purpose. By this means we give God "no rest," Isa. lxii. 7; which is the very character of importunity. Such souls go to God; and they are not satisfied with what they have done, and they go again; and somewhat abideth still with them, and they go to him again; and the heart is not yet emptied, they will go again to him, that he may have no rest. What variety of arguments are pleaded with God in this case I could manifest in the same David; but it is known to all. There is not any thing almost that he makes not a plea of,—the faithfulness, righteousness, name, mercy, goodness, and kindness of God in Jesus Christ; the concernment of others in him, both the friends and foes of God; his own weakness and helplessness, yea, the greatness of sin itself: "Be merciful to my sin," saith he, "for it is great." Sometimes he begins with some arguments of this kind; and then, being a little diverted by other considerations, some new plea is suggested unto him by the Spirit, and he returns immediately to his first employment and design;—all arguing great intension of mind and spirit.

(2*dly.*) *Constancy* also flows from intenseness. Such a soul will not give over until it obtain what it aims at and looks for; as we shall see in our process in opening this psalm.

And this is in general *the deportment of a gracious soul* in the condition here represented unto us. As poor creatures love their peace, as they love their souls, as they tender the glory of God, they are not to be wanting in this duty. What is the reason that controversies hang so long between God and your souls, that it may be you scarce see a good day all your lives? Is it not, for the most part, from your sloth and despondency of spirit? You will not gird up the loins of your minds, in dealing with God, to put them to a speedy issue in the blood of Christ. You go on and off, begin and cease, try and give over; and, for the most part, though your case be *extraordinary*, content yourselves with *ordinary* and customary applications unto God. This makes you wither, become useless, and pine away in and under your perplexities. David did not so; but after

Digitized by Google

many and many a breach made by sin, yet, through quick, vigorous, restless actings of faith, all was repaired, so that he lived peaceably, and died triumphantly. Up, then, and be doing; let not your "wounds corrupt because of your folly." Make thorough work of that which lies before you; be it long, or difficult, it is all one, it must be done, and is attended with safety. What you are like to meet withal in the first place shall nextly be declared.

VERSE THIRD.

The words of the verse explained, and their meaning opened.

THE *general frame* of a gracious soul, in its perplexities about sin, hath been declared. Its *particular actings*, what it doth, what it meets withal, are nextly represented unto us.

First, then, in particular, it cries out, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"

There is in the words a *supposition*, and an *inference* on that supposition. In the supposition there is,—1. The *name of God*, that is fixed on as suited unto it; and, 2. *The thing itself* supposed. In the inference there is expressed the matter of it, to "stand;" and the manner of its proposal, wherein two things occur:—1. That it is expressed by way of interrogation. 2. The indefiniteness of that interrogation, "Who shall stand?"

"If thou, LORD." He here fixes on another name of God, which is Jah;—a name, though from the same root with the former, yet seldom used but to intimate and express the terrible majesty of God: "He rideth on the heavens, and is extolled by his name JAH," Ps. lxviii. 4. He is to deal now with God about the guilt of sin; and God is represented to the soul as great and terrible, that he may know what to expect and look for, if the matter must be tried out according to the demerit of sin.

What, then, saith he to JAH? אִם־עֲוֹנוֹת תִּשְׁמָר,—"If thou shouldest mark iniquities." שָׁמַר is to observe and keep as in safe custody; to keep, preserve, and watch diligently; so to remark and observe, as to retain that which is observed, to ponder it, and lay it up in the heart. Gen. xxxvii. 11, Jacob "observed" Joseph's dream; that is, he retained the memory of it, and pondered it in his heart.

The marking of iniquities, then, here intended, is God's so far considering and observing of them as *to reserve them for punishment* and vengeance. In opposition unto this marking, he is said not to see sin, to overlook it, to cover it, or remember it no more; that is, to *forgive* it, as the next verse declares.

Digitized by Google

I need not show that God so far *marks all sins* in all persons as to see them, know them, disallow them, and to be displeased with them. This cannot be denied without taking away of all grounds of fear and worship. To deny it is all one as to deny the very being of God; deny his holiness and righteousness, and you deny his existence. But there is a day appointed, wherein all the men of the world shall know that God knew and took notice of all and every one of their most secret sins. There is, then, a double marking of sin in God; neither of which can be denied in reference unto any sins, in any persons. The first is *physical*, consisting in his omniscience, whereunto all things are open and naked. Thus no sin is hid from him; the secretest are before the light of his countenance. All are marked by him. Secondly, *moral*, in a displicency with or displeasure against every sin; which is inseparable from the nature of God, upon the account of his holiness. And this is declared in the sentence of the law, and that equally to all men in the world. But the marking here intended is that which is in a tendency to animadversion and punishment, according to the tenor of the law. Not only the sentence of the law, but a will of punishing according to it, is included in it. "If," saith the psalmist, "thou, the great and dreadful God, who art extolled by the glorious name Jah, shouldst take notice of iniquities, so as to recompense sinners that come unto thee according to the severity and exigence of thy holy law;"—what then? It is answered by the *matter of the proposal*, "Who can stand?" that is, none can so do. Τὸ γὰρ τίς ἐνταῦθα οὐδείς ἐστιν, says Chrysostom. This "*who*," is *none;* no man; not one in the world. מִי יַעֲמֹד, "Quis stabit?" or "consistet,"—"Who can stand?" or abide and endure the trial? Every one on this supposition must perish, and that eternally. This the desert of sin, and the curse of the law, which is the rule of this marking of their iniquity, doth require. And there is a notable emphasis in the interrogation, which contains *the manner of the inference.* "Who can stand?" is more than if he had said, "None can abide the trial, and escape without everlasting ruin;" for the interrogation is indefinite; not, "How can I?" but, "Who can stand?" When the Holy Ghost would set out the certainty and dreadfulness of the perishing of ungodly men, he doth it by such a kind of expression, wherein there is a deeper sense intimated into the minds of men than any words can well clothe or declare: 1 Pet. iv. 17, "What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel?" and verse 18, "Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" So here, "Who can stand?" There is a deep insinuation of a dreadful ruin as unto all with whom God shall so deal as to mark their iniquities. See Ps. i. 5.

The psalmist then addressing himself to deal with God about sin,

Digitized by Google

lays down in the first place, in the general, how things must go, not with himself only, but with all the world, upon the supposition he had fixed: "This is not my case only; but it is so with all mankind, every one who is partaker of flesh and blood. Whether their guilt answer that which I am oppressed withal or no, all is one; guilty they are all, and all must perish. How much more must that needs be my condition, who have contracted so great a guilt as I have done!" Here, then, he lays a great argument against himself, on the supposition before laid down: "If none, the holiest, the humblest, the most believing soul, can abide the trial, can endure; how much less can I, who am the chiefest of sinners, the least of saints, who come unspeakably behind them in holiness, and have equally gone beyond them in sin!"

This is the sense and importance of the words. Let us now consider how they are expressive of the actings of the soul whose state and condition is here represented unto us, and what directions they will afford unto us, to give unto them who are fallen into the same state.

What first presents itself to a soul in distress on the account of sin—This opened in four propositions—Thoughts of God's marking sin according to the tenor of the law full of dread and terror.

WHAT depths the psalmist was in hath been declared; in them what resolution he takes upon himself to seek God alone for relief and recovery hath been also showed; and what earnestness in general he useth therein. Addressing himself unto God in that frame, with that purpose and resolution, the first thing he fixeth on in particular is the greatness of his sin and guilt, according to the tenor of the law. It appears, then, that,—

First, *In a sin-perplexed soul's addresses unto God, the first thing that presents itself unto him is God's marking sin according to the tenor of the law.* The case is the same in this matter with all sorts of sinners, whether before conversion or in relapses and entanglements after conversion. There is a proportion between conversion and recoveries. They are both wrought by the same means and ways, and have both the same effects upon the souls of sinners, although in sundry things they differ, not now to be spoken unto. What, then, is spoken on this head may be applied unto both sorts,—to them that are yet unconverted, and to them who are really delivered from their state and condition; but especially unto those who know not whether state they belong unto, that is, to all guilty souls. The law will put in its claim to all. It will condemn the

Digitized by Google

sin, and try what it can do against the sinner. There is no shaking of it off; it must be fairly answered, or it will prevail. The law issues out an arrest for the debt; and it is to no purpose to bid the sergeant be gone, or to entreat him to spare. If payment be not procured, and an acquaintance produced, the soul must to prison. "I am going unto God," saith the soul; "he is great and terrible, a marker of sin, and what shall I say unto him?" This makes him tremble, and cry out, "O Lord, who shall stand?" So that it appears hence that,—

Secondly, *Serious thoughts of God's marking sin according to the tenor of the law is a thing full of dread and terror to the soul of a sinner.* But this is not all; he is not swallowed up in this amazement, crying out only, "Who can stand?" There is included in the words a thorough, sincere acknowledgment of his own sin and the guilt thereof. Mentioning the desert of sin, in his own case, he acknowledgeth his own. So that,—

Thirdly, *Sincere sense and acknowledgment for sin, with self-condemnation in the justification of God, is the first peculiar, especial working of a gracious soul rising out of its entanglements.* All this is included in these words. He acknowledgeth both his own guilt and the righteousness of God if he should deal with him according to the demerit of sin.

And these things lie in the words absolutely considered. But the state of the soul here represented carries us on farther. He rests not here, as we shall see in the opening of the next verse, the chief thing aimed at in the whole. And as a transition from the one to the other, that we may still carry on the general design at the entrance laid down, we must take along with us this farther observation:—

Fourthly, *Though self-condemnation be an eminent preparation for the discovery of forgiveness in God, yet a poor distressed soul is not to rest in it, nor to rest upon it, but to pass on to the embracing of forgiveness itself.*

There is yet a general proposition lying in the words that we may make use of in our passage, and it is this:—*God's marking of iniquities and man's salvation are everlastingly inconsistent.* I mean his marking them in the persons of sinners for the ends before mentioned.

Of some of these I shall farther treat, according as the handling of them conduceth to the purpose in hand.

That which I shall begin withal is that which was first laid down, about the effects of serious thoughts concerning God's marking sin according to the tenor of the law; which, as I said, is the first thing that presents itself unto a sin-entangled soul in its addresses unto God.

Digitized by Google

But this shall not pass alone. I shall draw the two first observations into one, and make use of the first only in the confirmation of the other; which will express the sense of the words absolutely considered. The third and fourth will lead us on in the progress of the soul towards the relief sought after and proposed. That, therefore, which is to be first insisted on comes up to this proposition:—

In a sin-perplexed soul's addresses unto God, the first thing that presents itself unto him is God's marking of sin according to the tenor of the law; which of itself is apt to fill the soul with dread and terror.

I shall first somewhat speak unto it in this, as considered in itself, and then inquire into the concernment of the soul in it, whose condition is here described.

The Lord speaks of some who, when they hear the word of the curse, yet "bless themselves," and say they shall have "peace," Deut. xxix. 19. Let men preach and say what they will of the terror of the Lord, they will despise it; which God threatens with utter extermination. And he notes it again as an amazing wickedness, and the height of obdurateness, Jer. xxxvi. 24. Generally it is with sinners as it was with Gaal the son of Ebed, Judges ix., when he was fortifying of Sichem against Abimelech. Zebul tells him that Abimelech will come and destroy him. "Let him come," saith Gaal, "I shall deal well enough with him. Let him bring forth his army; I fear him not." But upon the very first appearance of Abimelech's army he trembled for fear, verse 36. Tell obdurate sinners of the wrath of God, and that he will come to plead his cause against them; for the most part they take no notice of what you say, nor have any serious thoughts about it, but go on as if they were resolved they should deal well enough with him. Notwithstanding all their stoutness, a day is coming wherein fearfulness shall surprise them, and make them cry out, "Who among us shall dwell with devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Yea, if the Lord be pleased in this life, in an especial manner, to draw nigh to any of them, they quickly see that their "hearts cannot endure, nor can their hands be strong," Ezek. xxii. 14. Their hands hang down, and their stout hearts tremble like an aspen leaf.

He who *first sinned*, and had first occasion to have *serious thoughts about God's marking of sin*, gives us a notable instance of what we have affirmed; and the first in every kind is the *measure* of all that follows in the same kind. Gen. iii. 8, "He heard the voice of the LORD God;" so he had done before without the least trouble or consternation of spirit. He was made for communion with God; and that he might hear his voice was part of his blessedness. But now saith he, "I heard

Digitized by Google

thy voice and was afraid, and hid myself." He knew that God was coming on the *inquest* of sin, and he was not able to bear the thoughts of meeting him. Could he have gone into the bowels of the earth from whence he was taken, and have been there hid from God, he would not have failed to have attempted it. Things are now altered with him. In that God whom he loved before as a good, holy, powerful, righteous Creator, Preserver, Benefactor, and Rewarder, he saw nothing now but wrath, indignation, vengeance, and terror. This makes him tremble out those dreadful words, "I heard thy voice and was afraid, and hid myself."

The giving out of the law afterwards evinces what effects the consideration of God's proceeding with sinners according to the tenor of it must needs produce: Exod. xx. 18, 19, "All the people saw the thunderings and the lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking;" as the apostle also describes it, Heb. xii. 18. In this manner came forth from the Lord that "fiery law," Deut. xxxiii. 2; so that all who are concerned in it "did exceedingly quake and tremble." And yet all this respects but the severity of the law in general, without the application of it unto any soul in particular. There is a solemnity that carrieth an awe with it in the preparation of an assize to be kept and held by poor worms like ourselves; but the dread of it is peculiar to the malefactors for whose trial and execution all this preparation is made. When a soul comes to think that all this dreadful preparation, this appearance of terrible majesty, these streams of the fiery law, are all pointed towards him, it will make him cry out, "Lord, who can stand?" And this law is still in force towards sinners, even as it was on the day wherein it was given on mount Sinai. Though Moses grew old, yet his strength never failed; nor hath his law, the law given by him, lost any thing of its strength, power, or authority towards sinners. It is still accompanied with thunderings and lightnings, as of old; and it will not fail to represent the terror of the Lord to a guilty soul.

Among the saints themselves I could produce instances to manifest that they have found it to be thus. The cases of Job, David, Heman are known. I shall only consider it in Christ himself. From himself he had no occasion of any discouraging thought, being holy, harmless, undefiled. He fulfilled all righteousness, did his Father's will in all things, and abode in his love. This must needs be attended with the highest peace and most blessed joy. In the very entrance of his trials, he had a full persuasion of a comfortable issue and success; as we may see, Isa. l. 7–9. But yet when his soul was exercised with thoughts of God's marking our iniquities upon him, it was "sorrowful unto death." He was "sore amazed, and very heavy," Mark xiv. 33, 34. His agony; his blood-sweat; his strong cries and

Digitized by Google

supplications; his reiterated prayers, "If it be possible let this cup pass from me;" his last and dreadful cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—all manifest what apprehensions he had of what it was for God to mark iniquities. Well may poor sinners cry out, "Lord, who shall stand?" when the Son of God himself so trembled under the weight of it.

In serious thoughts of God's marking sin, he is represented unto the soul under all those glorious, terrible attributes and excellencies which are apt to beget a dread and terror in the hearts of sinners, when they have no relief from any covenant engagements in Christ. The soul looks upon him as the great lawgiver, James iv. 12,—able to revenge the breach of it, by destroying body and soul in hell fire; as one terrible in holiness, of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; so also in greatness and in power; the living God, into whose hands it is a fearful thing to fall; as attended with vindictive justice, saying, "Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense," Heb. x. 30. Now, for a soul to consider God, clothed with all these dreadful and terrible excellencies, coming to deal with sinners according to the tenor of his fiery law, it cannot but make him cry out, with Moses, "I exceedingly fear and quake."

These things work on their minds the conclusion mentioned before, as asserted in these words,—namely, that *God's marking of sin according to the tenor of the law, and man's salvation, are utterly inconsistent;* a conclusion that must needs shake a soul when pressed under a sense of its own guilt.

When a person who is really guilty, and knows himself to be guilty, is brought unto his trial, he hath but these four grounds of hope that his safety and his trial may be consistent. He may think that either,—1. The *judge* will not be able to find out or discover his crimes; or, 2. That some one will powerfully *intercede* for him with the judge; or, 3. That the *rule of the law* is not so strict as to take notice of his miscarriages; or, 4. That the *penalty* of it is not so severe but that there may be a way of escape. Cut him short of his expectations from some, one, or all of these, and all his hopes must of necessity perish. And how is it in this case?

1. Of the Judge we have spoken somewhat already. The present inquiry is, *Whether any thing may be hid from him or no,* and so a door of escape be opened to a sinner? The apostle tells us that "all things are naked and open unto him," Heb. iv. 13; and the psalmist, that "there is not a thought in our hearts, nor a word in our tongue, but he understandeth it afar off, and knoweth it altogether," Ps. cxxxix. 2–4. What the sinner knows of himself that may cause him to fear, that God knows; and what he knows not of himself that deserves his fear, that God knows also: "He is greater than our hearts, and

Digitized by Google

knoweth all things," 1 John iii. 20. When God shall not only set in order before the sinner the *secret sins* which he retains some remembrance of, but also brings to mind and represents unto him that world of filth and folly which either he never took any real notice of or hath utterly forgotten, it will trouble him, yea, confound him.

2. But may not this Judge be *entreated* to pass by what he knows, and to deal favourably with the sinner? May not an *intercessor* be obtained to plead in the behalf of the guilty soul? Eli determines this matter, 1 Sam. ii. 25, "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him; but if a man sin against the LORD, who shall intreat for him?" "There is not," saith Job, "between us מוֹכִיחַ, one that might argue the case, in pleading for me, and so make up the matter, 'laying his hand upon us both,'" chap. ix. 33. We now consider a sinner purely under the administration of the law, which knows nothing of a mediator. In that case, who shall take upon him to intercede for the sinner? Besides that all creatures in heaven and earth are engaged in the quarrel of God against sinners, and besides the greatness and terror of his majesty, that will certainly deter all or any of them from undertaking any such work, what is the request that in this case must be put up unto God? Is it not that he would cease to be holy, leave off from being righteous, relinquish his throne, deny himself and his sovereignty, that a rebel, a traitor, his cursed enemy, may live and escape his justice? Is this request reasonable? Is he fit to intercede for sinners that make it? Would he not by so doing prove himself to be the greatest of them? The sinner cannot, then, expect any door of escape to be opened unto him; all the world is against him; and the case must be tried out nakedly between God and him. But,—

3. It may be the *rule of the law* whereby the sinner is to be tried is not so *strict*, but that, in the case of *such sins* as he is guilty of, it may admit of a favourable interpretation; or that the good that he hath done may be laid in the balance against his evil, and so some relief be obtained that way. But the matter is quite otherwise. There is no good action of a sinner, though it were perfectly good, that can lie in the balance with, or compensate the evil of, the least sin committed; for all good is due on another account, though no guilt were incurred. And the payment of money that a man owes, that he hath borrowed, makes no satisfaction for what he hath stole; no more will our duties compensate for our sins. Nor is there any good action of a sinner but it hath evil and guilt enough attending it to render itself unacceptable; so that men may well cease from thoughts of their supererogation. Besides, where there is any one sin, if all the good in the world might be supposed to be in the same person, yet, in the indispensable order of our dependence on God, nothing

Digitized by Google

of that good could come into consideration until the guilt of that sin were answered for unto the utmost. Now, the penalty of every sin being the eternal ruin of the sinner, all his supposed good can stand him in little stead. And for the law itself, it is an issue of the holiness, righteousness, and wisdom of God; so that there is not any evil so great or small but is forbidden in it, and condemned by it. Hereupon David so states this whole matter, Ps. cxliii. 2, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified;"—that is, if things are to be tried out and determined by the law, no sinner can obtain acquitment; as Paul declares the sense of that place to be, Rom. iii. 20, Gal. ii. 16. But yet,—

4. It may be the *sentence of the law is not so fierce and dreadful, but that, though guilt be found, there may be yet a way of escape.* But the law speaks not one word on this side death to an offender. There is a greatness and an eternity of wrath in the sentence of it; and it is God himself who hath undertaken to see the vengeance of it executed. So that, on all these accounts, the conclusion mentioned must needs be fixed in the soul of a sinner that entertains thoughts of drawing nigh to God.

Though what hath been spoken may be of general use unto sinners of all sorts, whether called home to God or yet strangers to him, yet I shall not insist upon any general improvement of it, because it is intended only for one special end or purpose. That which is aimed at is, to show what are the first thoughts that arise in the heart of a poor entangled soul, when first he begins to endeavour a recovery in a returnal unto God. The law immediately puts in its claim unto him and against him;—God is represented unto him as angry, displeased, provoked; and his terror more or less besets him round about. This fills him with fear, shame, and confusion of face; so that he knows not what to do. These troubles are greater or lesser, according as God seeth it best for the poor creature's present humiliation and future safety. What, then, doth the sinner? what are his thoughts hereupon? Doth he think to fly from God, and to give over all endeavours of recovery? Doth he say, "This God is a holy and terrible God; I cannot serve him; it is to no purpose for me to look for any thing but fury and destruction from him: and therefore I had as good give over as persist in my design of drawing nigh to him?" It cannot be denied but that in this case thoughts of this nature will be suggested by unbelief, and that sometimes great perplexities arise to the soul by them: but this is not the issue and final product of this exercise of the soul; it produceth another effect; it calls for that which is the first particular working of a gracious soul arising out of its sin-entanglements. This is, as was declared, a sincere sense of sin, and acknowledgment of it, with self-condem-

Digitized by Google

nation in the justification of God; this is the first thing that a soul endeavouring a recovery from its depths is brought and wrought unto. His general resolution, to make serious and thorough work with what he hath in hand, was before unfolded. That which, in the next place, we are directed unto in these words is, the reflection on itself, upon the consideration of God's marking iniquity, now mentioned. This is faith's great and proper use of the law; the nature whereof shall be farther opened in the next discourse.

The first particular actings of a soul towards a recovery out of the depths of sin —Sense of sin, wherein it consists, how it is wrought—Acknowledgment of sin; its nature and properties—Self-condemnation.

WHAT is the frame of the soul in general that is excited by grace, and resolves in the strength thereof to attempt a recovery out of the depths of sin-entanglements, hath been declared. We have also showed what entertainments, in general, such a soul had need to expect, yea, ordinarily shall be sure to meet withal. It may be he goes forth at first like Samson with his locks cut, and thinks he will do as at other times; but he quickly finds his peace lost, his wounds painful, his conscience restless, God displeased, and his whole condition, as the utmost of his own apprehension, hazardous. This fills him with the thoughts expressed in this third verse, and fixes the conclusion in his mind discoursed of before. He finds now that he hath the law afresh to deal withal. Thence ariseth that sense and acknowledgment of sin, that self-condemnation in the justification of God, whereof we now speak. He grows not sullen, stubborn, displeased, and so runs away from God; he doth not "utterly faint," despond, and give over, he pleads not any thing in his own justification or for the extenuation of his sin and guilt; he quarrelleth not with, he repineth not against, the holiness, severity, and righteousness of the law of God; but reflects wholly on himself, his own unworthiness, guilt, and desert, and in a sense of them lies down at the foot of God, in expectation of his word and sentence.

Three things in this condition we ascribe unto such a soul:—

FIRST, *A sincere sense of sin.* There is a twofold sense of sin. The one is general and notional; whereby a man knows what sin is, that himself is a sinner,—that he is guilty of this or that, these or those sins; only his heart is not affected proportionably to that discovery and knowledge which he hath of these things. The other is active and efficacious. The soul being acquainted with the nature of

Digitized by Google

sin, with its own guilt in reference unto sin in general, as also to this or that sin, is universally influenced by that apprehension unto suitable affections and operations.

Of both these we have an instance in the same person. David, before Nathan's coming to him, had the former; afterwards he had the latter also. It cannot be imagined but that, before the coming of the prophet, he had a general knowledge and sense, not only absolutely of the nature of sin, but also that himself was a sinner, and guilty of those very sins which afterward he was reproved for. To think otherwise is to suppose not only that he was unsainted, but unmanned also and turned into a beast. But yet this wrought not in him any one affection suitable to his condition. And the like may be said of most sinners in the world. But now, when Nathan comes to him, and gives him the latter efficacious sense whereof we speak, we know what effects it did produce.

It is the latter only that is under consideration; and that also is twofold:—1. *Legal*, or *antecedaneous* unto conversion; 2. *Evangelical*, and previous to the recovery from depths, whereof we treat. How these two differ, and how they may be discerned one from the other, being both of them in their kind sincere, is not my business to declare.

Now, this last, which we assign as the first duty, work, or acting of a returning soul, is a deep and practical apprehension, wrought in the mind and heart of a believing sinner by the Holy Ghost, of sin and its evils, in reference unto the law and love of God, the cross and blood of Christ, the communion and consolation of the Spirit, and all the fruits of love, mercy, or grace that it hath been made partaker of, or on gospel ground hoped for.

1. The *principal efficient cause* of it is the Holy Ghost. He it is who "convinceth of sin," John xvi. 8. He works indeed by means,—he wrought it in David by the ministry of Nathan, and he wrought it in Peter by the look of Christ,—but his work it is; no man can work upon his own soul. It will not spring out of men's rational considerations. Though men may exercise their thoughts about such things, as one would think were enough to break the heart of stones, yet if the Holy Ghost put not forth a peculiar efficacy of his own, this sense of sin will not be wrought or produced. As the waters at the pool of Bethesda were not troubled but when an angel descended and moved them, no more will the heart for sin without a saving illapse of the Holy Ghost.

2. It is deep *apprehension of sin* and the evils of it. Slight, transient thoughts about them amount not to the sense of which we speak. "My sorrow," saith David, "is continually before me," Ps. xxxviii. 17. It pressed him always and greatly. Hence he compares this sense of sin wrought by the Holy Ghost to "arrows that

Digitized by Google

stick in the flesh," verse 2; they pain sorely and are always perplexing. Sin, in this sense of it, lays hold on the soul, so that the sinner cannot look up, Ps. xl. 12; and it abides with him, making "his sore run in the night without ceasing," Ps. lxxvii. 2, and depriveth the soul of rest. "My soul," saith he, "refused to be comforted." This apprehension of sin lies down and rises with him in whom it is. Transient thoughts, attended with infrequent sighs and ejaculations, little become a returning soul. And,—

3. It is *practical*. It is not seated only in the speculative part of the mind, hovering in general notions, but it dwells in the practical understanding, which effectually influenceth the will and affections,—such an apprehension as from which sorrow and humiliation are inseparable. The acts of the practical understanding do so necessarily produce together with them suitable acts of the will and affections, that some have concluded that those are indeed proper acts of the will which are usually ascribed to the understanding. It is so in the mind as that the whole soul is cast into the mould and likeness of it; humiliation, sorrow, self-abhorrency, do live and die with it.

4. (1.) It hath, in the first place, respect unto *the law of God*. There can be no due consideration of sin wherein the law hath not its place. The law calls for the sinner, and he willingly gives up his sin to be judged by it. There he sees it to be "exceeding sinful," Rom. vii. 13. Though a believer be less under the power of the law than others, yet he knows more of the authority and nature of it than others; he sees more of its spirituality and holiness. And the more a man sees of *the excellency of the law*, the more he sees of the *vileness of sin*. This is done by a soul in its first endeavour of a recovery from the entanglements of sin. He labours thoroughly to know his disease, that he may be cured. It will do him no good, he knows, to be ignorant of his distemper or his danger. He knows that if his wounds be not searched to the bottom, they will stink and be corrupt. To the law, then, he brings himself and his sin. By that he sees the vileness of the one and the danger of the other. Most men lie still in their depths, because they would willingly escape the first step of their rising. From the bottom of their misery, they would fain at once be at the top of their felicity. The soul managed in this work by the Holy Ghost doth not so. He converseth with the law, brings his sin unto it, and fully hears the sentence of it. When the sin is thoroughly condemned, then he farther takes care of the sinner. As ever you desire to come to rest, avoid not this entrance of your passion unto it. Weigh it well, and attend unto what the law speaks of your sin and its desert, or you will never make a due application to God for forgiveness. As ever you would have your souls *justified* by grace, take care to have your sins *judged* by the law.

Digitized by Google

(2.) There is a respect in it to *the love of God;* and this breaks the heart of the poor returning sinner. Sorrow from the law shuts itself up in the soul, and strangleth it. Sorrow from the thoughts of the love of God opens it, and causeth it to flow forth. Thoughts of sinning against the love of God, managed by the Holy Ghost;—what shall I say? their effects in the heart are not to be expressed. This made Ezra cry out, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee," chap. ix. 6; and verse 10, "What shall we say after this?" After what? Why, all the fruits of love and kindness they had been made partakers of. Thoughts of love and sin laid together make the soul blush, mourn, be ashamed, and confounded in itself. So Ezek. xxxvi. 31, "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good." When shall they do so? When thoughts and apprehensions of love shall be brought home to them; and, saith he, "Then shall ye lothe yourselves in your own sight." The soul now calls to mind what love, what kindness, and what mercy, what grace, what patience hath been exercised towards it, and whereof it hath been made partaker. The thoughts of all these now come in upon him as streams of water. Such mercy, such communion, such privileges, such hopes of glory, such tastes of heaven, such peace, such consolation, such joy, such communications of the Spirit,—all to a poor, wretched, cursed, lost, forlorn sinner; and all this despised, neglected! the God of them all provoked, forsaken! "Ah," saith the soul, "whither shall I cause my sorrow to go?" This fills him with shame and confusion of face, makes him mourn in secret, and sigh to the breaking of the loins. And then,—

(3.) *The blood and cross of Christ is also brought to remembrance by the Holy Ghost.* "Ah," saith the soul, "have I thus requited the wonderful, astonishing love of my Redeemer? Is this the return, the requital, I have made unto him? Are not heaven and earth astonished at the *despising* of that love, at which they are astonished?" This brake Peter's heart upon the look of Christ. Such words as these from Christ will, in this condition, sound in the ears of the soul: "Did I love thee, and leave my glory to become a scorn and reproach for thy sake? Did I think my life, and all that was dear unto me, too good for thee, to save thee from the wrath to come? Have I been a wilderness unto thee, or a land of darkness? What could I have done more for thee? When I had nothing left but my life, blood, and soul, they went all for thee, that thou mightst live by my death, be washed in my blood, and be saved through my soul's being made an offering for thee! And hast thou thus requited my love, to prefer a lust before me, or by mere sloth and folly to be turned away from me? Go, unkind and unthankful soul, and see if thou canst find another Redeemer." This overwhelms the soul, and

Digitized by Google

even drowns it in tears of sorrow. And then the bitterness also of the sufferings of Christ are brought to mind: "They look on him whom they have pierced, and mourn," Zech. xii. 10. They remember his gall and wormwood, his cry and tears, his agony and sweat, his desertion and anguish, his blood and death, the sharpness of the sword that was in his soul, and the bitterness of the cup that was put into his hand. Such a soul now looks on Christ, bleeding, dying, wrestling with wrath and curse for him, and seeth his sin in the streams of blood that issued from his side. And all this increaseth that sense of sin whereof we speak. Also,—

(4.) *It relates to the communion and consolations of the Holy Ghost*, with all the privileges and fruits of love we are by him made partakers of. The Spirit is given to believers, upon the promise of Christ, to dwell in them. He takes up their hearts to be his dwelling-place. To what ends and purposes? That he may purify and sanctify them, make them holy, and dedicate them to God; to furnish them with grace and gifts; to interest them in privileges; to guide, lead, direct, comfort them; to seal them unto the day of redemption. Now, this Spirit is grieved by sin, Eph. iv. 30, and his dwelling-place defiled thereby, 1 Cor. vi. 19, iii. 17. Thoughts hereof greatly sharpen the spiritual sense of sin in a recovering soul. He considers what light, what love, what joy, what consolation, what privileges, it hath by him been made partaker of; what motions, warnings, workings to keep it from sin, it hath found from him; and says within itself, "What have I done? whom have I grieved, whom have I provoked? What if the Lord should now, for my folly and ingratitude, utterly take his Holy Spirit from me? What if I should have so grieved him that he will dwell in me no more, delight in me no more? What dismal darkness and disconsolation, yea, what utter ruin should I be left unto! However, what shame and confusion of face belongs to me for my wretched disingenuity and ingratitude towards him!"

This is the FIRST thing that appears in the returning soul's actings and frame,—*a sincere sense of sin* on the account mentioned, wrought in it by the Holy Ghost. And this a soul in the depths described must come unto, if ever it expects or looks for deliverance and a recovery. Let not such persons expect to have a renewed sense of mercy without a revived sense of sin.

SECONDLY. From hence proceedeth *an ingenuous, free, gracious acknowledgment of sin.* Men may have a sense of sin, and yet suffer it to lie burning as a fire shut up in their bones, to their continual disquietment, and not be able to come off unto a free, soul-opening acknowledgment; yea, confession may be made in general, and mention therein of that very sin wherewith the soul is most entangled, and yet the soul come short of a due performance of this duty.

Digitized by Google

Consider how the case stood with David: Ps. xxxii. 3, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long." How could David keep silence, and yet roar all the day long? What is that silence which is consistent with roaring? It is a mere negation of that duty which is expressed, verse 5, that is intended: "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid." It was not a silence of submission and waiting on God that he intends; that would not have produced a wasting of his spiritual strength, as he complains this silence did: "My bones waxed old." Nor yet was it a sullen, stubborn, and contumacious frame that was upon him; but he notes, saith Calvin (and he says well), "Affectum qui medius est inter tolerantiam et contumaciam, vitio et virtuti affinis;"—"An affection between patience and stubbornness, bordering on the one and other." That is, he had a deep sense of sin; this disquieted and perplexed him all the day long; which he calls his roaring. It weakened and wearied him, making his bones wax old, or his strength decay; yet was he not able to bring his heart to that ingenuous, gracious acknowledgment which, like the lancing of a festered wound, would have given at least some ease to his soul. God's children are ofttimes in this matter like ours. Though they are convinced of a fault, and are really troubled at it, yet they will hardly acknowledge it. So do they. They will go up and down, sigh and mourn, roar all the day long; but an evil and untoward frame of spirit, under the power of unbelief and fear, keeps them from this duty.

Now, that this acknowledgment may be acceptable unto God, it is required, first, that it be *free;* then, that it be *full.*

1. It must be *free, and spiritually ingenuous.* Cain, Pharaoh, Ahab, Judas, came all to an acknowledgment of sin; but it was whether they would or no. It was pressed out of them; it did not flow from them. The confession of a person under the convincing terrors of the law or dread of imminent judgments is like that of malefactors on the rack, who speak out that for which themselves and friends must die. What they say, though it be the truth, is a fruit of force and torture, not of any ingenuity of mind. So is it with merely convinced persons. They come not to the acknowledgment of sin with any more freedom. And the reason is, because all sin hath shame; and for men to be free unto shame is naturally impossible, shame being nature's shrinking from itself and the posture it would appear in. But now the returning soul hath never more freedom, liberty, and aptitude of spirit, than when he is in the acknowledgment of those things whereof he is most ashamed. And this is no small evidence that it proceeds from that Spirit which is attended with that liberty; for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," 2 Cor. iii. 17. When David was delivered from his silence, he

Digitized by Google

expresseth this frame in the performance of his duty: Ps. xxxii. 5, "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions." His mouth is now open, and his heart enlarged, and he multiplies one expression upon another to manifest his enlargement. So doth a soul rising out of its depths, in this beginning of this address unto God. Having the sense of sin before described wrought in him by the Holy Ghost, his heart is made free, and enlarged unto an ingenuous acknowledgment of his sin before the Lord. Herein he pours out his soul unto God, and hath not more freedom in any thing than in dealing about that whereof he is most ashamed.

2. *Full* also it must be. Reserves ruin confession. If the soul have any secret thought of rolling a sweet morsel under its tongue, of a bow in the house of Rimmon, it is like part of the price kept back, which makes the whole robbery instead of an offering. If there be remaining a bitter root of favouring any one lust or sin, of any occasion of or temptation unto sin, let a man be as open, free, and earnest as can be imagined in the acknowledgment of all other sins and evils, the whole duty is rendered abominable. Some persons, when they are brought into depths and anguish about any sin, and are thereon forced to the acknowledgment of it, at the same time they are little concerned with their other follies and iniquities, that, it may be, are no less provoking unto God than that is from whence their present trouble doth arise. "Let not," as James speaks in another case, "such a man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord." It must be full and comprehensive, as well as free and ingenuous.

And of such importance is the right performance of this duty, that the promise of pardon is ofttimes peculiarly annexed unto it, as that which certainly carries along with it the other duties which make up a full returnal unto God, Prov. xxviii. 13; 1 John i. 9. And that place in Job is remarkable, chap. xxxiii. 27, 28, "He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light." He shall not only be made partaker of pardon, but of consolation also, and joy in the light of God's countenance.

THIRDLY. There yet remains *self-condemnation* with the justification of God, which lies expressly in the words of the verse under consideration; and hereof are two parts:—

1. *Self-abhorrency*, or dislike. The soul is now wholly displeased with itself, and reflects upon itself with all affections of regret and trouble. So the apostle declares it to have been with the Corinthians, when their godly sorrow was working in them, 2 Cor. vii. 11. Among other things, it wrought in them "indignation and re-

Digitized by Google

venge;" or a reflection on themselves with all manner of dislike and abhorrency. In the winding up of the controversy between God and Job, this is the point he rests in. As he had come in general to a free, full, ingenuous acknowledgment of sin, chap. xl. 4, 5, so in particular he gives up his whole contest in this abhorrency of himself, chap. xlii. 6, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." "What a vile, wretched creature have I been!" saith the soul. "I blush and am ashamed to think of my folly, baseness, and ingratitude. Is it possible that I should deal thus with the Lord? I abhor, I loathe myself; I would fly anywhere from myself, I am so vile and loathsome,—a thing to be despised of God, angels, and men." And,—

2. There is *self-judging* in it also. This the apostle invites the Corinthians unto, 1 Epist. xi. 31, "If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." This is a person pronouncing sentence on himself according to the tenor of the law. The soul brings not only its sin but itself also to the law. It puts itself, as to merit and desert, under the stroke and severity of it. Hence ariseth a full justification of God in what sentences soever he shall be pleased to pronounce in the case before him.

And these three things which we have passed through compose the frame and first actings of a gracious soul rising from its depths. They are all of them signally expressed in that place where we have a signal recovery exemplified, Hos. xiv. 1–3. And this makes way for the exaltation of grace, the great thing in all this dispensation aimed at by God, Eph. i. 6. That which he is now doing is to bring the soul to glory in him, 1 Cor. i. 31; which is all the return he hath from his large and infinitely bountiful expenses of grace and mercy. Now, nothing can render grace conspicuous and glorious until the soul come to this frame. Grace will not seem high until the soul be laid very low. And this also suits or prepares the soul for the receiving of mercy in a sense of pardon, the great thing aimed at on the part of the sinner; and it prepares it for every duty that is incumbent on him in that condition wherein he is. This brings the soul to waiting with diligence and patience. If things presently answer not our expectation, we are ready to think we have done what we can; if it will be no better, we must bear it as we are able;—which frame God abhors. The soul in this frame is contented to wait the pleasure of God, as we shall see in the close of this psalm. "Oh," saith such a one, "if ever I obtain a sense of love, if ever I enjoy one smile of his countenance more, it is of unspeakable grace. Let him take his own time, his own season; it is good for me quietly to wait, and to hope for his salvation." And it puts the soul on prayer; yea, a soul in this frame prays always. And there is nothing more evident than that want of

Digitized by Google

a thorough engagement unto the performance of these duties is the great cause why so few come clear off from their entanglement all their days. Men heal their wounds slightly; and, therefore, after a new, painful festering, they are brought into the same condition of restlessness and trouble which they were in before.

Grounds of miscarriages when persons are convinced of sin and humbled—Resting in that state—Resting on it.

THE soul is not to be left in the state before described. There is other work for it to apply itself unto, if it intend to come unto rest and peace. It hath obtained an eminent advantage for the discovery of forgiveness; but to *rest in that state wherein it is*, or to *rest upon it*, will not bring it into its harbour. Three things we discovered before in the soul's first serious address unto God for deliverance,—sense of sin, acknowledgment of it, and self-condemnation. Two evils there are which attend men oftentimes when they are brought into that state. Some rest in it, and press no farther; some rest upon it, and suppose that it is all which is required of them. The psalmist avoids both these, and notwithstanding all his pressures reacheth out towards forgiveness, as we shall see in the next verse. I shall briefly unfold these two evils, and show the necessity of their avoidance:—

First, By *resting or staying in it*, I mean the soul's desponding, through discouraging thoughts that deliverance is not to be obtained. Being made deeply sensible of sin, it is so overwhelmed with thoughts of its own vileness and unworthiness as to sink under the burden. Such a soul is "afflicted, and tossed with tempest, and not comforted," Isa. liv. 11, until it is quite weary;—as a ship in a storm at sea, when all means of contending are gone, men give up themselves to be driven and tossed by the winds and seas at their pleasure. This brought Israel to that state wherein he cried out, "My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God," chap. xl. 27; and Zion, "The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me," chap. xlix. 14. The soul begins secretly to think there is no hope; God regardeth it not; it shall one day perish; relief is far away, and trouble nigh at hand. These thoughts do so oppress them, that though they forsake not God utterly to their destruction, yet they draw not nigh unto him effectually to their consolation.

This is the first evil that the soul in this condition is enabled to avoid. We know how God rebukes it in Zion: "Zion said, The

Digitized by Google

LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me," chap. xlix. 14. But how foolish is Zion, how froward, how unbelieving in this matter! What ground hath she for such sinful despondencies, such discouraging conclusions? "Can a woman," saith the Lord, "forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." The like reproof he gives to Jacob upon the like complaint, chap. xl. 28–31. There is nothing that is more provoking to the Lord, nor more disadvantageous unto the soul, than such sinful despondency; for,—

1. It *insensibly weakens the soul*, and disenables it both for present duties and future endeavours. Hence some poor creatures mourn, and even pine away in this condition, never getting one step beyond a perplexing sense of sin all their days. Some have dwelt so long upon it, and have so entangled themselves with a multitude of perplexed thoughts, that at length their natural faculties have been weakened and rendered utterly useless; so that they have lost both sense of sin and every thing else. Against some, Satan hath taken advantage to cast in so many entangling objections into their minds, that their whole time hath been taken up in proposing doubts and objections against themselves; with these they have gone up and down to one and another, and being never able to come unto a consistency in their own thoughts, they have spent all their days in a fruitless, sapless, withering, comfortless condition. Some, with whom things come to a better issue, are yet for a season brought to that discomposure of spirit, or are so filled with their own apprehensions, that when the things which are most proper to their condition are spoken to them, they take no impression in the least upon them. Thus the soul is weakened by dwelling too long on these considerations; until some cry with those in Ezek. xxxiii. 10, "Our sins are upon us, we pine away in them, how should we then live?"

2. This frame, if it abides by itself, will insensibly give countenance unto *hard thoughts of God*, and so to repining and weariness in waiting on him. At first the soul neither apprehends nor fears any such issue. It supposeth that it shall condemn and abhor itself and justify God, and that for ever. But when relief comes not in, this resolution begins to weaken. Secret thoughts arise in the heart that God is austere, inexorable, and not to be dealt withal. This sometimes casts forth such complaints as will bring the soul unto new complaints before it comes to have an issue of its trials. Here, in humiliation antecedaneous to conversion, many a convinced person perisheth. They cannot wait God's season, and perish under their impatience. And what the saints of God themselves have been overtaken withal in their depths and trials, we have many examples and

Digitized by Google

instances. Delight and expectations are the grounds of our abiding with God. Both these are weakened by a conquering, prevailing sense of sin, without some relief from the discovery of forgiveness, though at a distance. And, therefore, our perplexed soul stays not here, but presseth on towards that discovery.

Secondly, There is a *resting on this frame* that is noxious and hurtful also. Some finding this sense of sin, with those other things that attend it, wrought in them in some measure, begin to think that now all is well, this is all that is of them required. They will endeavour to make a life from such arguments of comfort as they can take from their trouble. They think this a ground of peace, that they have not peace. Here some take up before conversion, and it proves their ruin. Because they are convinced of sin, and troubled about it, and burdened with it, they think it shall be well with them. But were not Cain, Esau, Saul, Ahab, Judas, convinced of sin and burdened with it? Did this profit them? did it interest them in the promises? Did not the wrath of God overtake them notwithstanding? So is it with many daily; they think their *conviction* is *conversion*, and that their sins are pardoned because they have been troubled.

This, then, is that which we reject, which the soul in this condition doth carefully avoid,—so to satisfy itself with its humiliation, as to make that a ground of supportment and consolation, being thereby kept off from exercising faith for forgiveness; for this is,—

1. *A fruit of self-righteousness.* For a soul to place the spring of its peace or comfort in any thing of its own, is to fall short of Christ and to take up in self. We must not only be "justified," but "glory" in him also, Isa. xlv. 25. Men may make use of the evidence of their graces, but only as *mediums* to a farther end; not as the *rest* of the soul in the least. And this deprives men's very humiliations of all gospel humility. True humility consists more in believing than in being sensible of sin. That is the soul's great self-emptying and abasing; this may consist with an obstinate resolution to scamble for something upon the account of self-endeavours.

2. Though evangelical sense of sin be a grace, yet it is not the *uniting grace;* it is not that which *interests* us in Christ, not that which peculiarly and in its own nature exalts him. There is in this sense of sin that which is natural and that which is spiritual; or the matter of it and its spirituality. The former consists in sorrow, trouble, self-abasement, dejection, and anxiety of mind, with the like passions. Of these I may say, as the apostle of afflictions, "They are not joyous, but grievous." They are such as are accompanied with the aversation of the object which they are conversant about. In their own nature they are no more but the soul's retreat into itself,

Digitized by Google

with an abhorrency of the objects of its sorrow and grief. When these affections are spiritualized, their nature is not changed. The soul in and by them acts according to their nature; and doth by them, as such, but retreat into itself, with a dislike of that they are exercised about. To take up here, then, must needs be to sit down short of Christ, whether it be for life or consolation.

Let there be no mistake. There can be no evangelical sense of sin and humiliation where there is not union with Christ, Zech. xii. 10. Only in itself and in its own nature it is not availing. Now, Christ is the only rest of our souls; in any thing, for any end or purpose, to take up short of him is to lose it. It is not enough that we be "prisoners of hope," but we must "turn to our stronghold," Zech. ix. 12; not enough that we are "weary and heavy laden," but we must "come to him," Matt. xi. 28–30. It will not suffice that we are weak, and know we are weak, but we must "take hold on the strength of God," Isa. xxvii. 4, 5.

3. Indeed, *pressing after forgiveness is the very life and power of evangelical humiliation.* How shall a man know that his humiliation is evangelical, that his sorrow is according to God? Is it not from hence he may be resolved, that he doth not in it as Cain did, who cried his sins were greater than he could bear, and so departed from the presence of God; nor as Judas did, who repented and hanged himself; nor as Felix did,—tremble for a while, and then return to his lusts; nor as the Jews did in the prophet, pine away under their iniquities because of vexation of heart? Nor doth he divert his thoughts to other things, thereby to relieve his soul in his trouble; nor fix upon a righteousness of his own; nor slothfully lie down under his perplexity, but in the midst of it he plies himself to God in Christ for pardon and mercy. And it is the soul's application unto God for forgiveness, and not its sense of sin, that gives unto God the glory of his grace.

Thus far, then, have we accompanied the soul in its depths. It is now looking out for forgiveness; which, what it is, and how we come to have an interest in it, the principal matter in this discourse intended, is nextly to be considered.

VERSE FOURTH.

The words explained, and the design or scope of the psalmist in them discovered.

THE state and condition of the soul making application unto God in this psalm is recounted, verse 1. It was in the "depths:" not only

Digitized by Google

providential depths of trouble, affliction, and perplexities thereon; but also *depths of conscience,* distress on the account of sin; as in the opening of those words have been declared.

The application of this soul unto God, with restless fervency and earnestness, in that state and condition; its consideration in the first place of the law, and the severity of God's justice in a procedure thereon, with the inevitable ruin of all sinners if God insist on that way of dealing with them,—have also been opened and manifested from the foregoing verses.

Being in this estate, perplexed in itself, lost in and under the consideration of God's marking iniquity according to the tenor of the law, that which it fixes on, from whence any relief, stay, or supportment might be expected in such a condition, is laid down in this verse.

Verse 4.—"But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

I shall first open the words as to their signification and importance; then show the design of the psalmist in them, with reference to the soul whose condition is here represented; and, lastly, propose the general truths contained in them, wherein all our concernments do lie.

"There is forgiveness." Ἱλασμός say the LXX., and Jerome accordingly, "propitiatio," "propitiation;" which is somewhat more than "venia," or "pardon," as by some it is rendered.

הַסְלִיחָה, "Condonatio ipsa," "Forgiveness itself." It is from סָלַח, to spare, to pardon, to forgive, to be propitious; and is opposed to חָסַל, a word composed of the same letters varied (which is common in that language), signifying to cut off and destroy.

Now, it is constantly applied unto sin, and expresseth every thing that concurs to its pardon or forgiveness; as,—

First, It expresseth the mind or will of pardoning, or God's gracious readiness to forgive: Ps. lxxxvi. 5, "Thou, Lord, art good, וְסַלָּח, and ready to forgive;" χρηστὸς καὶ ἐπιεικής, "benign and meek," or "sparing, propitious,"—of a gracious, merciful heart and nature. So Neh. ix. 17, "Thou art a God" סְלִיחוֹת "propitiationum," "of propitiations or pardons;" or, as we have rendered it, "ready to forgive,"—"a God of forgivenesses;" or, "all plenty of them is in thy gracious heart," Isa. lv. 7, "so that thou art always ready to make out pardons to sinners." The word is used again, Dan. ix. 9, to the same purpose.

Secondly, It regards the act of pardoning, or actual forgiveness itself: Ps. ciii. 3, הַסֹּלֵחַ, "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities,"—"actually dischargeth thee of them;" which place the apostle respecting, renders the word by χαρισάμενος: Col. ii. 13, "Having freely forgiven you" (for so much the word imports) "all your trespasses."

Digitized by Google

And this is the word that God useth in the covenant, in that great promise of grace and pardon, Jer. xxxi. 34.

It is warrantable for us, yea, necessary, to take the word in the utmost extent of its signification and use. It is a word of favour, and requires an interpretation tending towards the enlargement of it. We see it may be rendered ἱλασμός, or "propitiation;" χάρις, or "grace;" and "venia," or "pardon;" and may denote these three things:—

1. The *gracious, tender, merciful heart and will of God,* who is the God of pardons and forgivenesses; or ready to forgive, to give out mercy, to add to pardon.

2. *A respect unto Jesus Christ,* the only ἱλασμός, or propitiation for sin, as he is expressly called, Rom. iii. 25; 1 John ii. 2. And this is that which interposeth between the gracious heart of God and the actual pardon of sinners. *All forgiveness is founded on propitiation.*

3. It denotes *condonation, or actual forgiveness itself,* as we are made partakers of it; comprising it both actively, as it is an act of grace in God, and passively, as terminated in our souls, with the deliverance that attends it. In this sense, as it looks downwards and in its effects respects us, it is of mere grace; as it looks upwards to its causes and respects the Lord Christ, it is from propitiation or atonement. And this is that pardon which is administered in the covenant of grace.

Now, as to the place which these words enjoy in this psalm, and their relation to the state and condition of the soul here mentioned, this seems to be their importance:—

"O Lord, although this must be granted, that if thou shouldst mark iniquities according to the tenor of the law, every man living must perish, and that for ever; yet there is hope for my soul, that even I, who am in the depths of sin-entanglements, may find acceptance with thee: for whilst I am putting my mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope, I find that there is an atonement, a propitiation made for sin, on the account whereof thou sayest thou hast found a ransom, and wilt not deal with them that come unto thee according to the severity and exigence of thy justice; but art gracious, loving, tender, ready to forgive and pardon, and dost so accordingly. THERE IS FORGIVENESS WITH THEE."

The following words, "Therefore thou shalt be feared," or "That thou mayest be feared," though in the original free from all ambiguity, yet are so signally varied by interpreters, that it may not be amiss to take notice of it in our passage.

The Targum hath it, "That thou mayest be seen." This answers not the word, but it doth the sense of the place well enough. God in his displeasure is said to hide himself or his face: Isa. viii. 17, "The LORD hideth his face from the house of Jacob." By forgiveness we

Digitized by Google

obtain again the light of his countenance. This dispels the darkness and clouds that are about him, and gives us a comfortable prospect of his face and favour. "There is forgiveness with him that he may be seen." Besides, there is but one letter different in the original words, and that which is usually changed for the other.

The LXX. render them, Ἕνεκα τοῦ ὀνόματός σου,—"For thy name's sake," or "thy own sake;" that is, freely, without any respect unto any thing in us. This also would admit of a fair and sound construction, but that there is more than ordinary evidence of the places being corrupted: for the Vulgar Latin, which, as to the Psalms, was translated out of the LXX., renders these words, "Propter legem tuam,"—"For thy law's sake;" which makes it evident that that translator reads the words ἕνεκα τοῦ νόμου σου, and not ὀνόματος, as now we read. Now, though this hath in itself no proper sense (for forgiveness is not bestowed for the law's sake), yet it discovers the original of the whole mistake. תּוֹרָה, "the law," differs but in one letter from תִּוָּרֵא, "that thou mayest be feared;" by a mistake whereof this ἕνεκα τοῦ νόμου, "for thy law's sake," crept into the text. Nor doth this any thing countenance the corrupt figment of the novelty of the Hebrew vowels and accents, as though this difference might arise from the LXX. using a copy that had none,—that is, before their invention, which might occasion mistakes and differences; for this difference is in a letter as well as in the vowels, and therefore there can be no colour for this conceit, unless we say also that they had copies of old with other consonants than those we now enjoy. Bellarmine, in his exposition of this place, endeavours to give countenance unto the reading of the Vulgar Latin, "For thy law's sake;" affirming that by the law here, not the law of our obedience is intended, but the law or order of God's dealing with us,—that is, his mercy and faithfulness;—which is a mere new invention to countenance an old error, which any tolerable ingenuity would have confessed, rather than have justified by so sorry a pretence; for neither is that expression or that word ever used in the sense here by him feigned, nor can it have any such signification.

Jerome renders these words, "Ut sis terribilis,"—"That thou mayest be dreadful or terrible;" doubtless not according to the intendment of the place. It is for the relieving of the soul, and not for the increasing of its dread and terror, that this observation is made, "There is forgiveness with thee."

But the words are clear, and their sense is obvious. לְמַעַן תִּוָּרֵא,—"Therefore thou shalt be feared;" or, "That thou mayest be feared."

By the "fear of the LORD," in the Old Testament, the whole worship of God, moral and instituted, all the obedience which we owe unto him, both for matter and manner, is intended. Whatever we

Digitized by Google

are to perform unto God, being to be carried on and performed with reverence and godly fear, by a metonymy of the adjunct, that name is given to the whole. "That thou mayest be feared," then, is, "That thou mayest be served, worshipped; that I, who am ready to faint and give over on the account of sin, may yet be encouraged unto, and yet continue in, that obedience which thou requirest at my hands:" and this appears to be the sense of the whole verse, as influenced by and from those foregoing:—

"Although, O Lord, no man can approach unto thee, stand before thee, or walk with thee, if thou shouldst mark their sins and follies according to the tenor of the law, nor could they serve so great and holy a God as thou art; yet because I know from thy revelation of it that there is also with thee, on the account of Jesus Christ the propitiation, pardon and forgiveness, I am encouraged to continue with thee, waiting for thee, worshipping of thee, when, without this discovery, I should rather choose to have rocks and mountains fall upon me, to hide me from thy presence."

"But there is forgiveness with thee, and therefore thou shalt be feared."

The words being thus opened, we may take a full view in them of the state and condition of the soul expressed in this psalm; and that answering the experiences of all who have had any thing to do with God in and about the depths and entanglements of sin.

Having in and from his great depths, verse 1, addressed himself with fervent, redoubled cries, yea, outcries to God, and to him alone, for relief, verses 1, 2; having also acknowledged his iniquities, and considered them according to the tenor of the law, verse 3; he confesseth himself to be lost and undone for ever on that account, verse 3. But he abides not in the state of self-condemnation and dejection of soul; he says not, "There is no hope; God is a jealous God, a holy God, I cannot serve him; his law is a fiery law, which I cannot stand before; so that I had as good give over, sit down and perish, as contend any longer!" No; but searching by faith into the discovery that God makes of himself in Christ through the covenant of grace, he finds a stable foundation of encouragement to continue waiting on him, with expectation of mercy and pardon.

Propositions or observations from the former exposition of the words—The first proposed to confirmation—No encouragement for any sinner to approach unto God without a discovery of forgiveness.

FROM the words unfolded, as they lie in their contexture in the psalm, the ensuing propositions do arise:—

Digitized by Google

First, Faith's discovery of forgiveness in God, though it have no present sense of its own peculiar interest therein, is the great supportment of a sin-perplexed soul.

Secondly, Gospel forgiveness, whose discovery is the sole supportment of sin-distressed souls, relates to the gracious heart or good will of the Father, the God of forgiveness, the propitiation that is made by the blood of the Son, and free condonation or pardon according to the tenor of the covenant of grace.

Thirdly, Faith's discovery of forgiveness in God is the sole bottom of adherence to him, in acceptable worship and reverential obedience.

The first of these is that whose confirmation and improvement I principally aim at; and the others only so far as they have coincidence therewith, or may be used in a subserviency to the illustration or demonstration thereof.

In the handling, then, of this truth, that it may be of the more advantage unto them whose good is sought and intended in the proposal and management of it, I shall steer this course, and show,—

FIRST, That there is not the least encouragement to the soul of a sinner to deal with God without this discovery.

SECONDLY, That this discovery of forgiveness in God is a matter great, holy, and mysterious; and which very few on gospel abiding grounds do attain unto.

THIRDLY, That yet this is a great, sacred, and certain truth, as from the manifold evidences of it may be made to appear.

FOURTHLY, That this is a stable supportment unto a sin-distressed soul shall be manifested, and the whole applied, according to the several concernments of those who shall consider it.

FIRST. *There is not the least encouragement for the soul of a sinner to entertain any thoughts of approaching unto God without this discovery.* All the rest of the world is covered with a deluge of wrath. This is the only ark whereunto the soul may repair and find rest. All without it is darkness, curse, and terror.

We have an instance and example of it, beyond all exception, in Adam. When he knew himself to be a sinner (and it was impossible for him, as we shall show afterward, to make a discovery of any such thing as forgiveness with God), he laid aside all thoughts of treating with him; the best of his foolish contrivance was for an escape: Gen. iii. 10, "I heard thy voice," saith he to God, "in the garden, and I was AFRAID, because I was naked; and I HID myself." Nothing but "Thou shalt die the death," sounded in his ears. In the morning of that day, he was made by the hand of God; a few hours before, he had converse and communion with him, with boldness and peace; why, then, doth nothing now but fear, flying, and hiding, possess him? Adam had sinned, the promise was not yet given, no revela-

Digitized by Google

tion made of forgiveness in God; and what other course than that vain and foolish one to fix upon he knew not. No more can any of his posterity, without this revelation. What else any of them hath fixed on in this case hath been no less foolish than his hiding; and in most, more pernicious. When Cain had received his sentence from God, it is said "he went out מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה, from the presence" or face "of the LORD," Gen. iv. 16. From his providential presence he could never subduct himself: so the psalmist informs us at large, Ps. cxxxix. 7–10. The very heathen knew, by the light of nature, that guilt could never drive men out of the reach of God:—

> "Quo fugis Encelade? quascunque accesseris oras
> Sub Jove semper eris."

They knew that δίκη (the vengeance of God) would not spare sinners, nor could be avoided, Acts xxviii. 4. From God's gracious presence, which he never enjoyed, he could not depart. It was, then, his presence as to his worship, and all outward acts of communion, that he forsook, and departed from. He had no discovery by faith of forgiveness, and therefore resolved to have no more to do with God, nor those who cleaved to him; for it respects his course, and not any one particular action.

This also is stated, Isa. xxxiii. 14, "The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" The persons spoken of are sinners, great sinners, and hypocrites. Conviction of sin and the desert of it was fallen upon them; a light to discern forgiveness they had not; they apprehend God as devouring fire and everlasting burnings only,—one that would not spare, but assuredly inflict punishment according to the desert of sin; and thence is their conclusion, couched in their interrogation, that there can be no intercourse of peace between him and them,—there is no abiding, no enduring of his presence. And what condition this consideration brings the souls of sinners unto, when conviction grows strong upon them, the Holy Ghost declares: Micah vi. 6, 7, "Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Sense of sin presseth, forgiveness is not discovered (like the Philistines on Saul, Samuel not coming to his direction); and how doth the poor creature perplex itself in vain, to find out a way of dealing with God? "Will a sedulous and diligent observation of his own ordinances and institutions relieve me? 'Shall I come

Digitized by Google

before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old?'" Alas! thou art a sinner, and these sacrifices cannot make thee "perfect," or acquit thee, Heb. x. 1. "Shall I do more than ever he required of any of the sons of men? O that I had 'thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil' to offer to him!" Alas! if thou hadst all the "bulls and goats" in the world, "it is not possible that their blood should take away sins," verse 4. "But I have heard of them who have snatched their own children from their mothers' breasts, and cast them into the fire, until they were consumed, so to pacify their consciences in expiating the guilt of their iniquities. Shall I take this course? will it relieve me? I am ready to part with my 'first-born' into the fire, so I may have deliverance from my 'transgression.'" Alas! this never came into the heart of God to approve or accept of. And as it was then, whilst that kind of worship was in force, so is it still as to any duties really to be performed, or imaginarily. Where there is no discovery of forgiveness, they will yield the soul no relief, no supportment; God is not to be treated upon such terms.

Greatness and rareness of the discovery of forgiveness in God—Reasons of it—Testimonies of conscience and law against it, etc.

SECONDLY. *This discovery of forgiveness in God is great, holy, and mysterious, and which very few on gospel grounds do attain unto.*

All men, indeed, *say* there is; most men are persuaded that they *think* so. Only men in great and desperate extremities, like Cain or Spira, seem to call it into question. But their thoughts are empty, groundless, yea, for the most part wicked and atheistical. Elihu tells us, that to declare this aright to a sinful soul, it is the work of "a messenger, an interpreter, one among a thousand," Job xxxiii. 23; that is, indeed, of Christ himself. The common thoughts of men about this thing are slight and foolish, and may be resolved into those mentioned by the psalmist, Ps. l. 21. They think that "God is altogether such an one as themselves;" that, indeed, he takes little or no care about these things, but passeth them over as slightly as they do themselves. That, notwithstanding all their pretences, the most of men never had indeed any real discovery of forgiveness, shall be afterward undeniably evinced; and I shall speedily show the difference that is between their vain credulity and a gracious gospel discovery of forgiveness in God. For it must be observed, that by this discovery I intend both the revelation of it made by God and our

Digitized by Google

understanding and reception of that revelation to our own advantage; as shall be showed immediately.

Now, the grounds of the difficulty intimated consist partly in the hinderances that lie in the way of this discovery, and partly in the nature of the thing itself that is discovered; of both which I shall briefly treat.

But here, before I proceed, somewhat must be premised to show what it is that I particularly intend by a discovery of forgiveness. It may, then, be considered two ways:—1. For a *doctrinal, objective* discovery of it in its *truth*. 2. An *experimental, subjective* discovery of it in its *power*. In the first sense, forgiveness in God hath been discovered ever since the giving out of the first promise: God revealed it in a word of promise, or it could never have been known; as shall be afterward declared. In this sense, after many lesser degrees and advancements of the light of it, it was fully and gloriously brought forth by the Lord Jesus Christ in his own person, and is now revealed and preached in the gospel, and by them to whom the word of reconciliation is committed; and to declare this is the principal work of the ministers of the gospel. Herein lie those unsearchable treasures and riches of Christ, which the apostle esteemed as his chiefest honour and privilege that he was intrusted with the declaration and dispensation of, Eph. iii. 8, 9. I know by many it is despised, by many traduced, whose ignorance and blindness is to be lamented; but the day is coming which will manifest every man's work of what sort it is. In the latter sense, how it is made by faith in the soul, shall in its proper place be farther opened and made known. Here many men mistake and deceive themselves. Because it is so in the *book*, they think it is so in *them* also. Because they have been taught it, they think they believe it. But it is not so; they have not heard this voice of God at any time, nor seen his shape. It hath not been revealed unto them in its power.

To have this done is a great work; for,—

First, The constant voice of conscience lies against it. Conscience, if not seared, inexorably condemneth and pronounceth wrath and anger upon the soul that hath the least guilt cleaving to it. Now, it hath this advantage, it lieth close to the soul, and by importunity and loud speaking it will be heard in what it hath to say; it will make the whole soul attend, or it will speak like thunder. And its constant voice is, that where there is guilt there must be judgment, Rom. ii. 14, 15. Conscience naturally knows nothing of forgiveness; yea, it is against its very trust, work, and office to hear any thing of it. If a man of courage and honesty be intrusted to keep a garrison against an enemy, let one come and tell him that there is peace made between those whom he serves and their enemies, so that he may

Digitized by Google

leave his guard, and set open the gates, and cease his watchfulness; how wary will he be, lest under this pretence he be betrayed! "No," saith he; "I will keep my hold until I have express order from my superiors." Conscience is intrusted with the power of God in the soul of a sinner, with command to keep all in subjection with reference unto the judgment to come. It will not betray its trust in believing every report of peace. No; but this it says, and it speaks in the name of God, "Guilt and punishment are inseparable twins; if the soul sin, God will judge. What tell you me of forgiveness? I know what my commission is, and that I will abide by. You shall not bring in a superior commander, a cross principle, into my trust; for if this be so, it seems I must let go my throne,—another lord must come in;" not knowing, as yet, how this whole business is compounded in the blood of Christ. Now, whom should a man believe if not his own conscience, which, as it will not flatter him, so it intends not to affright him, but to speak the truth as the matter requireth? Conscience hath two works in reference unto sin,—one to condemn the *acts* of sin, another to judge the *person* of the sinner; both with reference to the judgment of God. When forgiveness comes, it would sever and part these employments, and take one of them out of the hand of conscience; it would divide the spoil with this strong one. It shall condemn the fact, or every sin: but it shall no more condemn the sinner, the person of the sinner; that shall be freed from its sentence. Here conscience labours with all its might to keep its whole dominion, and to keep out the power of forgiveness from being enthroned in the soul. It will allow men to talk of forgiveness, to hear it preached, though they abuse it every day; but to receive it in its power, that stands up in direct opposition to its dominion. "In the kingdom," saith conscience, "I will be greater than thou;" and in many, in the most, it keeps its possession, and will not be deposed.

Nor, indeed, is it an easy work so to deal with it. The apostle tells us that all the sacrifices of the law could not do it, Heb. x. 2: they could not bring a man into that estate wherein he "should have no more conscience of sin;"—that is, conscience condemning the person; for conscience in a sense of sin, and condemnation of it, is never to be taken away. And this can be no otherwise done but by the blood of Christ, as the apostle at large there declares.

It is, then, no easy thing to make a discovery of forgiveness unto a soul, when the work and employment which conscience, upon unquestionable grounds, challengeth unto itself lies in opposition unto it. Hence is the soul's great desire to establish its own righteousness, whereby its natural principles may be preserved in their power. Let self-righteousness be enthroned, and natural conscience desires no

Digitized by Google

more; it is satisfied and pacified. The law it knows, and righteousness it knows; but as for forgiveness, it says, "Whence is it?" Unto the utmost, until Christ perfects his conquest, there are on this account secret strugglings in the heart against free pardon in the gospel, and fluctuations of mind and spirit about it. Yea, hence are the doubts and fears of believers themselves. They are nothing but the strivings of conscience to keep its whole dominion, to condemn the sinner as well as the sin. More or less it keeps up its pretensions against the gospel whilst we live in this world. It is a great work that the blood of Christ hath to do upon the conscience of a sinner; for whereas, as it hath been declared, it hath a power, and claims a right to condemn both sin and sinner, the one part of this its power is to be cleared, strengthened, made more active, vigorous, and watchful, the other to be taken quite away. It shall now see more sins than formerly, more of the vileness of all sins than formerly, and condemn them with more abhorrency than ever, upon more and more glorious accounts than formerly; but it is also made to see an interposition between these sins and the person of the sinner who hath committed them, which is no small or ordinary work.

Secondly, The law lies against this discovery. The law is a beam of the holiness of God himself. What it speaks unto us, it speaks in the name and authority of God; and I shall briefly show concerning it these two things:—1. That this is the voice of the *law*,—namely, that there is no forgiveness for a sinner. 2. That a *sinner* hath great reason to give credit to the law in that assertion.

1. It is certain that the law *knows neither mercy nor forgiveness.* The very sanction of it lies wholly against them: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die;" "Cursed is he that continueth not in all things in the book of the law to do them," Deut. xxvii. 26; [Gal. iii. 10.] Hence the apostle pronounceth universally, without exception, that they who "are under the law are under the curse," Gal. iii. 10; and saith he, verse 12, "The law is not of faith." There is an inconsistency between the law and believing; they cannot have their abode in power together. "'Do this and live;' fail and die," is the constant, immutable voice of the law. This it speaks in general to all, and this in particular to every one.

2. The sinner seems to have manifold and weighty reasons to attend to the voice of this law, and to acquiesce in its sentence; for,—

(1.) The law is *connatural* to him; his domestic, his old acquaintance. It came into the world with him, and hath grown up with him from his infancy. It was implanted in his heart by nature,—is his own reason; he can never shake it off or part with it. It is his familiar, his friend, that cleaves to him as the flesh to the bone; so that they who have not the law written cannot but show forth the

Digitized by Google

work of the law, Rom. ii. 14, 15, and that because the law itself is inbred to them. And all the faculties of the soul are at peace with it, in subjection to it. It is the bond and ligament of their union, harmony, and correspondency among themselves, in all their moral actings. It gives life, order, motion to them all. Now, the gospel, that comes to control this sentence of the law, and to relieve the sinner from it, is foreign to his nature, a strange thing to him, a thing he hath no acquaintance or familiarity with; it hath not been bred up with him; nor is there any thing in him to side with it, to make a party for it, or to plead in its behalf. Now, shall not a man rather believe a domestic, a friend, indeed himself, than a foreigner, a stranger, that comes with uncouth principles, and such as suit not its reason at all? 1 Cor. i. 18.

(2.) The *law* speaks nothing to a sinner but what his *conscience* assures him to be true. There is a constant concurrence in the testimony of the law and conscience. When the law says, "This or that is a sin worthy of death," conscience says, "It is even so," Rom. i. 32. And where the law of itself, as being a general rule, rests, conscience helps it on, and says, "This and that sin, so worthy of death, is the soul guilty of." "Then die," saith the law, "as thou hast deserved." Now, this must needs have a mighty efficacy to prevail with the soul to give credit to the report and testimony of the law; it speaks not one word but what he hath a witness within himself to the truth of it. These witnesses always agree; and so it seems to be established for a truth that there is no forgiveness.

(3.) The law, though it speak against the *soul's interest*, yet it speaks nothing but what is so just, righteous, and equal, that it even forceth the soul's consent. So Paul tells us, that men know this voice of the law to be the "judgment of God," Rom. i. 32. They know it, and cannot but consent unto it, that it is the judgment of God,—that is, good, righteous, equal, not to be controlled. And, indeed, what can be more righteous than its sentence? It commands obedience to the God of life and death; promiseth a reward, and declares that for non-performance of duty, death will be inflicted. On these terms the sinner cometh into the world. They are good, righteous, holy; the soul accepts of them, and knows not what it can desire better or more equal. This the apostle insists upon, chap. vii. 12, 13, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which was good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." Wherever the blame falls, the soul cannot but acquit the law, and confess that what it says is righteous and uncontrollably equal. And it is meet things should be so. Now,

Digitized by Google

though the authority and credit of a witness may go very far in a doubtful matter, when there is a concurrence of more witnesses it strengthens the testimony; but nothing is so prevalent to beget belief as when the things themselves that are spoken are just and good, not liable to any reasonable exception. And so is it in this case: unto the authority of the law and concurrence of conscience, this also is added, the reasonableness and equity of the thing itself proposed, even in the judgment of the sinner,—namely, that every sin shall be punished, and every transgression receive a meet recompense of reward.

(4.) But yet farther. What the *law* says, it speaks in the *name and authority of God.* What it says, then, must be believed, or we make God a liar. It comes not in its own name, but in the name of him who appointed it. You will say, then, "Is it so indeed? Is there no forgiveness with God? For this is the constant voice of the law, which you say speaks in the name and authority of God, and is therefore to be believed." I answer briefly with the apostle, "What the law speaks, it speaks to them that are under the law." It doth not speak to them that are "in Christ," whom the "law of the Spirit of life hath set free from the law of sin and death;" but to them that are "under the law" it speaks; and it speaks the very truth, and it speaks in the name of God, and its testimony is to be received. It says there is no forgiveness in God, namely, to them that are under the law; and they that shall flatter themselves with a contrary persuasion will find themselves wofully mistaken at the great day.

On these and the like considerations, I say, there seems to be a great deal of reason why a soul should conclude that it will be according to the testimony of the law, and that he shall not find forgiveness. Law and conscience close together, and insinuate themselves into the thoughts, mind, and judgment of a sinner. They strengthen the testimony of one another, and greatly prevail. If any are otherwise minded, I leave them to the trial. If ever God awaken their consciences to a thorough performance of their duty,—if ever he open their souls, and let in the light and power of the law upon them,—they will find it no small work to grapple with them. I am sure that eventually they prevail so far, that in the preaching of the gospel we have great cause to say, "Lord, who hath believed our report?" We come with our report of forgiveness, but who believes it? by whom is it received? Neither doth the light, nor conscience, nor conversation of the most, allow us to suppose it is embraced.

Thirdly, The *ingrafted notions that are in the minds of men concerning the nature and justice of God* lie against this discovery also. There are in all men by nature indelible characters of the holiness

Digitized by Google

and purity of God, of his justice and hatred of sin, of his invariable righteousness in the government of the world, that they can neither depose nor lay aside; for notions of God, whatever they are, will bear sway and rule in the heart, when things are put to the trial. They were in the heathens of old; they abode with them in all their darkness; as might be manifested by innumerable instances. But so it is in all men by nature. Their inward thought is, that God is an avenger of sin; that it belongs to his rule and government of the world, his holiness and righteousness, to take care that every sin be punished; this is his judgment, which all men know, as was observed before, Rom. i. 32. They know that it is a righteous thing with God to render tribulation unto sinners. From thence is that dread and fear which surpriseth men at an apprehension of the presence of God, or of any thing under him, above them, that may seem to come on his errand. This notion of God's avenging all sin exerts itself secretly but effectually. So Adam trembled, and hid himself. And it was the saying of old, "I have seen God, and shall die." When men are under any dreadful providence,—thunderings, lightnings, tempests, in darkness,—they tremble; not so much at what they see, or hear, or feel, as from their secret thoughts that God is nigh, and that he is a consuming fire.

Now, these inbred notions lie universally against all apprehensions of forgiveness, which must be brought into the soul from without doors, having no principle of nature to promote them.

It is true, men by nature have presumptions and common ingrafted notions of other properties of God besides his holiness and justice,—as of his goodness, benignity, love of his creatures, and the like; but all these have this supposition inlaid with them in the souls of men, namely, that all things stand between God and his creatures as they did at their first creation. And as they have no natural notion of forgiveness, so the interposition of sin weakens, disturbs, darkens them, as to any improvement of those apprehensions of goodness and benignity which they have. If they have any notion of forgiveness, it is from some corrupt tradition, and not at all from any universal principle that is inbred in nature, such as are those which they have of God's holiness and vindictive justice.

And this is the first ground; from whence it appears that a real, solid discovery of forgiveness is indeed a great work; many difficulties and hinderances lie in the way of its accomplishment.

Digitized by Google

False presumptions of forgiveness discovered—Differences between them and faith evangelical.

BEFORE I proceed to produce and manage the remaining evidences of this truth, because what hath been spoken lies obnoxious and open to an objection, which must needs rise in the minds of many, that it may not thereby be rendered useless unto them, I shall remove it out of the way, that we may pass on to what remains.

It will, then, be said, "Doth not all this lie directly contrary to our daily experience? Do ye not find all men full enough, most too full, of apprehensions of forgiveness with God? What so common as 'God is merciful?' Are not the consciences and convictions of the most stifled by this apprehension? Can you find a man that is otherwise minded? Is it not a common complaint, that men presume on it unto their eternal ruin? Certainly, then, that which all men do, which every man can so easily do, and which you cannot keep men off from doing, though it be to their hurt, hath no such difficulty in it as is pretended." And on this very account hath this weak endeavour to demonstrate this truth been by some laughed to scorn; men who have taken upon them the teaching of others, but, as it seems, had need be taught themselves the very "first principles of the oracles of God."

Ans. All this, then, I say, is so, and much more to this purpose may be spoken. The folly and presumption of poor souls herein can never be enough lamented. But it is one thing to embrace a cloud, a shadow, another to have the truth in reality. I shall hereafter show the true nature of forgiveness and wherein it doth consist, whereby the vanity of this self-deceiving will be discovered and laid open. It will appear in the issue, that, notwithstanding all their pretensions, the most of men know nothing at all, or not any thing to the purpose, of that which is under consideration. I shall, therefore, for the present, in some few observations, show how far this delusion of many differs from a true gospel discovery of forgiveness, such as that we are inquiring after.

First, The common notion of forgiveness that men have in the world is twofold:—1. An *atheistical presumption* on God, that he is not *so just and holy*, or not just and holy in such a way and manner, as he is by some represented, is the ground of their persuasion of forgiveness. Men think that some declarations of God are fitted only to make them mad; that he takes little notice of these things; and that what he doth, he will easily pass by, as, they suppose, better becomes him. "Come, 'let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die.'" This is their inward thought, "The LORD will not do good,

Digitized by Google

neither will he do evil;" which, says the psalmist, is men's thinking that God is such a one as themselves, Ps. l. 21. They have no deep nor serious thoughts of his greatness, holiness, purity, severity, but think that he is like themselves, so far as not to be much moved with what they do. What thoughts they have of sin, the same they think God hath. If with them a slight ejaculation be enough to expiate sin, that their consciences be no more troubled, they think it is enough with God that it be not punished. The generality of men make light work of sin; and yet in nothing doth it more appear what thoughts they have of God. He that hath slight thoughts of sin had never great thoughts of God. Indeed, men's undervaluing of sin ariseth merely from their contempt of God. All sin's concernments flow from its relation unto God; and as men's apprehensions are of God, so will they be of sin, which is an opposition to him. This is the frame of the most of men,—they know little of God, and are little troubled about any thing that relates unto him. God is not reverenced, sin is but a trifle, forgiveness a matter of nothing; whoso will may have it for asking. But shall this atheistical wickedness of the heart of man be called a discovery of forgiveness? Is not this to make God an idol? He who is not acquainted with God's holiness and purity, who knows not sin's desert and sinfulness, knows nothing of forgiveness.

2. From the doctrine of the gospel commonly preached and made known, there is a *general notion* begotten in the minds of men that God is ready to forgive. Men, I say, from hence have a doctrinal apprehension of this truth, without any real, satisfactory foundation of that apprehension as to themselves. This they have heard, this they have been often told; so they think, and so they resolved to do. A general persuasion hereof spreads itself over all to whom the sound of the gospel doth come. It is not fiducially resolved into the gospel, but is an opinion growing out of the report of it.

Some relief men find by it in the common course of their conversation, in the duties of worship which they do perform, as also in their troubles and distresses, whether internal and of conscience, or external and of providence, so that they resolve to retain it.

And this is that which I shall briefly speak unto, and therein manifest the differences between this common prevailing apprehension of forgiveness, and faith's discovery of it to the soul in its power.

(1.) That which we reject is *loose* and *general;* not fixed, ingrafted, or planted on the mind. So is it always where the minds of men receive things only in their notion and not in their power. It wants fixedness and foundation; which defects accompany all notions of the mind that are only retained in the memory, not implanted in the judgment. They have general thoughts of it, which they use as

Digitized by Google

occasion serves. They hear that God is a merciful God, and as such they intend to deal with him. For the true bottom, rise, and foundation of it,—whence or on what account the pure and holy God, who will do no iniquity, the righteous God, whose judgment it is that they that commit sin are worthy of death, should yet pardon iniquity, transgression, and sin,—they weigh it not, they consider it not; or, if they do, it is in a slight and notional way, as they consider the thing itself. They take it for granted so it is, and are never put seriously upon the inquiry how it comes to be so; and that because indeed they have no real concernment in it. How many thousands may we meet withal who take it for granted that forgiveness is to be had with God, that never yet had any serious exercise in their souls about the grounds of it, and its consistency with his holiness and justice! But those that know it by faith have a sense of it fixed particularly and distinctly on their minds. They have been put upon an inquiry into the rise and grounds of it in Christ; so that on a good and unquestionable foundation they can go to God and say, "There is forgiveness with thee." They see how and by what means more glory comes unto God by forgiveness than by punishing of sin; which is a matter that the other sort of men are not at all solicitous about. If they may escape punishment, whether God have any glory or no, for the most part they are indifferent.

(2.) The *first apprehension ariseth without any trial* upon inquiry in the consciences of them in whom it is. They have not, by the power of their convictions and distresses of conscience, been put to make inquiry whether this thing be so or no. It is not a persuasion that they have arrived unto in a way of seeking satisfaction to their own souls. It is not the result of a deep inquiry after peace and rest. It is antecedent unto trial and experience, and so is not faith, but opinion; for although faith be not experience, yet it is inseparable from it, as is every practical habit. Distresses in their consciences have been prevented by this opinion, not removed. The reason why the most of men are not troubled about their sins to any purpose, is from a persuasion that God is merciful and will pardon; when indeed none can really, on a gospel account, ordinarily, have that persuasion, but those who have been troubled for sin, and that to the purpose. So is it with them that make this discovery by faith. They have had conflicts in their own spirits, and, being deprived of peace, have accomplished a diligent search whether forgiveness were to be obtained or no. The persuasion they have of it, be it more or less, is the issue of a trial they have had in their own souls, of an inquiry how things stood between God and them as to peace and acceptation of their persons. This is a vast difference. The one sort might possibly have had trouble in their

Digitized by Google

consciences about sin, had it not been for their *opinion of forgiveness.* This hath prevented or stifled their convictions;—not healed their wounds, which is the work of the gospel; but kept them from being wounded, which is the work of security. Yea, here lies the ruin of the most of them who perish under the preaching of the gospel. They have received *the general notion of pardon;* it floats in their minds, and presently presents itself to their relief on all occasions. Doth God at any time, in the dispensation of the word, under an affliction, upon some great sin against their ruling light, begin to deal with their consciences?—before their conviction can ripen or come to any perfection, before it draw nigh to its perfect work, they choke it, and heal their consciences with this notion of pardon. Many a man, between the assembly and his dwelling-house, is thus cured. You may see them go away shaking their heads, and striking on their breasts, and before they come home be as whole as ever. "Well, God is merciful, there is pardon," hath wrought the cure. The other sort have obtained their persuasion as a result of the discovery of Christ in the gospel, upon a full conviction. Trials they have had, and this is the issue.

(3.) *The one which we reject worketh no love to God,* no delight in him, no reverence of him, but *rather a contempt and commonness of spirit* in dealing with him. There are none in the world that deal worse with God than those who have an ungrounded persuasion of forgiveness. And if they do fear him, or love him, or obey him in any thing, more or less, it is on other motives and considerations, which will not render any thing they do acceptable, and not at all on this. As he is good to the creation, they may love, as he is great and powerful, they may fear him; but sense of pardon, as to any such ends or purposes, hath no power upon them. Carnal boldness, formality, and despising of God, are the common issues of such a notion and persuasion. Indeed, this is the generation of great sinners in the world; men who have a general apprehension, but not a sense of the special power of pardon, openly or secretly, in fleshly or spiritual sins, are the great sinners among men. Where faith makes a discovery of forgiveness, all things are otherwise. Great love, fear, and reverence of God, are its attendants. Mary Magdalene loved much, because much was forgiven. *Great love* will spring out of *great forgiveness.* "There is forgiveness with thee," saith the psalmist, "that thou mayest be feared." No unbeliever doth truly and experimentally know the truth of this inference. But so it is when men "fear the LORD, and his goodness," Hos. iii. 5. I say, then, where pardoning mercy is truly apprehended, where faith makes a discovery of it to the soul, it is endeared unto God, and possessed of the great springs of love, delight, fear, and reverence, Ps. cxvi. 1, 5–7.

Digitized by Google

(4.) This *notional apprehension of the pardon of sin begets no serious, thorough hatred and detestation of sin, nor is prevalent to a relinquishment of it;* nay, it rather secretly insinuates into the soul encouragements unto a continuance in it. It is the nature of it to lessen and extenuate sin, and to support the soul against its convictions. So Jude tells us, that some "turn the grace of God into lasciviousness," verse 4; and says he, "They are 'ungodly men;' let them profess what they will, they are ungodly men." But how can they turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness? Is grace capable of a conversion into lust or sin? Will what was once grace ever become wantonness? It is objective, not subjective grace, the doctrine, not the real substance of grace, that is intended. The doctrine of forgiveness is this grace of God, which may be thus abused. From hence do men who have only a general notion of it habitually draw secret encouragements to sin and folly. Paul also lets us know that carnal men, coming to a doctrinal acquaintance with gospel grace, are very apt to make such conclusions, Rom. vi. 1. And it will appear at the last day how unspeakably this glorious grace hath been perverted in the world. It would be well for many if they had never heard the name of forgiveness. It is otherwise where this revelation is received indeed in the soul by believing, Rom. vi. 14. Our being under grace, under the power of the belief of forgiveness, is our great preservative from our being under the power of sin. Faith of forgiveness is the principle of gospel obedience, Tit. ii. 11, 12.

(5.) The *general notion of forgiveness brings with it no sweetness, no rest to the soul.* Flashes of joy it may, abiding rest it doth not. The truth of the doctrine fluctuates to and fro in the minds of those that have it, but their wills and affections have no solid delight nor rest by it. Hence, notwithstanding all that profession that is made in the world of forgiveness, the most of men ultimately resolve their peace and comfort unto themselves. As their apprehensions are of their own doing, good or evil, according to their ruling light, whatever it be, so as to peace and rest are they secretly tossed up and down. Every one in his several way pleaseth himself with what he doth in answer unto his own convictions, and is disquieted as to his state and condition, according as he seems to himself to come short thereof. To make a full life of contentation upon pardon, they know not how to do it. One duty yields them more true repose than many thoughts of forgiveness. But faith finds sweetness and rest in it; being thereby apprehended, it is the only harbour of the soul. It leads a man to God as good, to Christ as rest. Fading evanid joys do ofttimes attend the one; but solid delight, with constant obedience, are the fruits only of the other.

(6.) Those who have the former only take up their persuasion on

Digitized by Google

false grounds, though the thing itself be true; and they cannot but use it unto false ends and purposes, besides its natural and genuine tendency. For their grounds, they will be discovered when I come to treat of the true nature of gospel forgiveness. For the end, it is used generally only to fill up what is wanting. Self-righteousness is their bottom; and when that is too short or narrow to cover them, they piece it out by forgiveness. Where conscience accuses, this must supply the defect. Faith lays it on its proper foundation, of which afterwards also; and it useth it to its proper end,—namely, to be the sole and only ground of our acceptation with God. That is the proper use of forgiveness, that all may be of grace; for when the foundation is pardon, the whole superstructure must needs be grace. From what hath been spoken it is evident that, notwithstanding the pretences to the contrary, insinuated in the objection now removed, it is a great thing to have gospel forgiveness discovered unto a soul in a saving manner.

The true nature of gospel forgiveness—Its relation to the goodness, grace, and will of God; to the blood of Christ; to the promise of the gospel—The considerations of faith about it.

THE difficulties that lie in the way of faith's discovery of forgiveness, whence it appears to be a matter of greater weight and importance than it is commonly apprehended to be, have been insisted on in the foregoing discourse. There is yet remaining another ground of the same truth. Now, this is taken from the nature and greatness of the thing itself discovered,—that is, of forgiveness. To this end I shall show what it is, wherein it doth consist, what it comprises and relates unto, according to the importance of the second proposition before laid down.

I do not in this place take forgiveness, strictly and precisely, for the *act of pardoning;* nor shall I dispute what that is, and wherein it doth consist. Consciences that come with sin-entanglements unto God know nothing of such disputes. Nor will this expression, "There is forgiveness with God," bear any such restriction as that it should regard only actual condonation or pardon. That which I have to do is to inquire into the nature of that pardon which poor, convinced, troubled souls seek after, and which the Scripture proposeth to them for their relief and rest. And I shall not handle this absolutely neither, but in relation to the truth under consideration,—namely, that it is a great thing to attain unto a true gospel discovery of forgiveness.

First, As was showed in the opening of the words, the forgive-

Digitized by Google

ness inquired after hath relation unto *the gracious heart of the Father.* Two things I understand hereby:—1. *The infinite goodness and graciousness of his nature.* 2. *The sovereign purpose of his will and grace.*

1. There is considerable in it *the infinite goodness of his nature.* Sin stands in a contrariety unto God. It is a rebellion against his sovereignty, an opposition to his holiness, a provocation to his justice, a rejection of his yoke, a casting off, what lies in the sinner, of that dependence which a creature hath on its Creator. That God, then, should have pity and compassion on sinners, in every one of whose sins there is all this evil, and inconceivably more than we can comprehend, it argues an infinitely gracious, good, and loving heart and nature in him; for God doth nothing but suitably to the properties of his nature, and from them. All the acts of his will are the effects of his nature.

Now, whatever God proposeth as an encouragement for sinners to come to him, that is of, or hath a special influence into, the forgiveness that is with him; for nothing can encourage a sinner as such, but under this consideration, that it is, or it respects, forgiveness. That this graciousness of God's nature lies at the head or spring, and is the root from whence forgiveness doth grow, is manifest from that solemn proclamation which he made of old of his name, and the revelation of his nature therein (for God assuredly is what by himself he is called): Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7, "The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." His forgiving of iniquity flows from hence, that in his nature he is merciful, gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness. Were he not so, infinite in all these, it were in vain to look for forgiveness from him. Having made this known to be his name, and thereby declared his nature, he in many places proposeth it as a relief, a refuge for sinners, an encouragement to come unto him, and to wait for mercy from him: Ps. ix. 10, "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee." It will encourage them so to do; others have no foundation of their confidence. But if this name of God be indeed made known unto us by the Holy Ghost, what can hinder why we should not repair unto him and rest upon him? So Isa. l. 10, "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God." Not only sinners, but sinners in great distress are here spoken unto. Darkness of state or condition, in the Scripture, denotes every thing of disconsolation and trouble. To be, then, in darkness, where yet there is some light, some relief, though darkness be predominant, is

Digitized by Google

sad and disconsolate; but now, not only to be, but also to walk, that is, to continue a course in darkness, and that with no light, no discovery of help or relief,—this seems an overwhelming condition: yet sinners in this estate are called "to trust in the name of the LORD." I have showed before that nothing but forgiveness, or that which influenceth it and encourageth to an expectation of it, is of any use unto a sinner, much more one in so great distress upon the account of sin; yet is such a one here sent only to the *name of the Lord*, wherein his gracious heart and nature is revealed. That, then, is the very fountain and spring of forgiveness. And this is that which John would work a sense of upon our souls where he tells us that "God is love," 1 Epist. iv. 8, or one of an infinitely gracious, tender, good, compassionate, loving nature. Infinite goodness and grace is the soil wherein forgiveness grows. It is impossible this flower should spring from any other root. Unless this be revealed to the soul, forgiveness is not revealed. To consider pardon merely as it is terminated on ourselves, not as it flows from God, will bring neither profit to us nor glory to God.

And this also (which is our design in hand) will make it appear that this discovery of forgiveness whereof we speak is indeed no common thing,—is a great discovery. Let men come, with a sense of the guilt of sin, to have deep and serious thoughts of God, they will find it no such easy and light matter to have their hearts truly and thoroughly apprehensive of this loving and gracious nature of God in reference unto pardon. It is an easy matter to say so in common; but the soul will not find it so easy to believe it for itself. What hath been spoken before concerning the ingrafted notions that are in the minds of men about the justice, holiness, and severity of God, will here take place. Though men profess that God is gracious, yet that aversation which they have unto him and communion with him doth abundantly manifest that they do not believe what they say and profess: if they did, they could not but delight and trust in him, which they do not; for "They that know his name will put their trust in him." So said the slothful servant in the gospel, "I knew that thou wast austere, and not for me to deal withal." It may be he professed otherwise before, but that lay in his heart when it came to the trial. But this, I say, is necessary to them unto whom this discovery is to be made, even a spiritual apprehension of the gracious, loving heart and nature of God. This is the spring of all that follows; and the fountain must needs be infinitely sweet from whence such streams do flow. He that considers the glorious fabric of heaven and earth, with the things in them contained, must needs conclude that they were the product of infinite wisdom and power; nothing less or under them could have brought forth such an effect. And he

Digitized by Google

that really considereth forgiveness, and looks on it with a spiritual eye, must conclude that it comes from infinite goodness and grace. And this is that which the hearts of sinners are exercised about when they come to deal for pardon: Ps. lxxxvi. 5, "Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive;" Neh. ix. 17, "Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness;" and Micah vii. 18, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity? .... because he delighteth in mercy." And God encourageth them hereunto wherever he says that he forgives sins and blots out iniquities for his own sake or his name's sake; that is, he will deal with sinners according to the goodness of his own gracious nature. So Hos. xi. 9, "I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man." Were there no more mercy, grace, compassion to be showed in this case than it is possible should be treasured up in the heart of a man, it would be impossible that Ephraim should be spared; but saith he, "I am God, and not man." Consider the infinite largeness, bounty, and goodness of the heart of God, and there is yet hope. When a sinner is in good earnest seeking after forgiveness, there is nothing he is more solicitous about than the heart of God towards him,—nothing that he more labours to have a discovery of; there is nothing that sin and Satan labour more to hide from him. This he rolls in his mind, and exercises his thoughts about; and if ever that voice of God, Isa. xxvii. 4, "Fury is not in me," sound in his heart, he is relieved from his great distresses. And the fear of our hearts in this matter our Saviour seems to intend the prevention or a removal of: John xvi. 26, 27, "I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loveth you." They had good thoughts of the tender heart and care of Christ himself, the mediator, towards them; but what is the heart of the Father? what acceptance shall they find with him? Will Christ pray that they may find favour with him? Why, saith he, as to the love of his heart, "There is no need of it; 'for the Father himself loveth you.'" If this, then, belongeth to forgiveness, as whoever hath sought for it knoweth that it doth, it is certainly no common discovery to have it revealed unto us.

To have all the clouds and darkness that are raised by sin between us and the throne of God dispelled; to have the fire, and storms, and tempests, that are kindled and stirred up about him by the law removed; to have his glorious face unvailed, and his holy heart laid open, and a view given of those infinite treasures and stores of goodness, mercy, love, and kindness which have had an unchangeable habitation therein from all eternity; to have a discovery of these eternal springs of forbearance and forgiveness,—is that which none but Christ can accomplish and bring about, John xvii. 6.

Digitized by Google

2. This is not all. This eternal ocean, that is infinitely satisfied with its own fulness and perfection, doth not naturally yield forth streams for our refreshment. Mercy and pardon do not come forth from God as light doth from the sun or water from the sea, by a necessary consequence of their natures, whether they will or no. It doth not necessarily follow that any one must be made partaker of forgiveness because God is infinitely gracious; for may he not do what he will with his own? "Who hath first given unto him, that it should be recompensed unto him again?" Rom. xi. 35. All the fruits of God's goodness and grace are in the sole keeping of his own *sovereign will* and pleasure. This is his great glory: Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19, "Show me thy glory," saith Moses. "And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious." Upon that proclamation of the name of God, that he is merciful, gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness, some might conclude that it could not be otherwise with any but well;—he is such a one as that men need scarce be beholding to him for mercy. "Nay," saith he; "but this is my great glory, that 'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious.'" There must be an interposition of a free act of the will of God to deal with us according to this his abundant goodness, or we can have no interest therein. This I call the purpose of his grace, or "The good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself," Eph. i. 9; or, as it is termed, verses 5, 6, "The good pleasure of his will," that he hath purposed "to the praise of his glorious grace." *This free and gracious pleasure of God, or purpose of his will to act towards sinners according to his own abundant goodness,* is another thing that influences the forgiveness of which we treat. Pardon flows immediately from a sovereign act of free grace. This free purpose of God's will and grace for the pardoning of sinners is indeed that which is principally intended when we say, "There is forgiveness with him;" that is, he is pleased to forgive, and so to do is agreeable unto his nature. Now, the mystery of this grace is deep; it is eternal, and therefore incomprehensible. Few there are whose hearts are raised to a contemplation of it. Men rest and content themselves in a general notion of mercy, which will not be advantageous to their souls. Freed they would be from punishment, but what it is to be forgiven they inquire not. So what they know of it they come easily by, but will find in the issue it will stand them in little stead. But these fountains of God's actings are revealed, that they may be the fountains of our comforts.

Now, of this purpose of God's grace there are several acts, all of them relating unto gospel forgiveness:—

(1.) There is *his purpose of sending his Son to be the great means*

Digitized by Google

of procuring, of purchasing forgiveness. Though God be infinitely and incomprehensibly gracious, though he purpose to exert his grace and goodness toward sinners, yet he will so do it, do it in such a way, as shall not be prejudicial to his own holiness and righteousness. His justice must be satisfied, and his holy indignation against sin made known. Wherefore he purposeth to send his Son, and hath sent him, to make way for the exercise of mercy; so as no way to eclipse the glory of his justice, holiness, and hatred of sin. Better we should all eternally come short of forgiveness than that God should lose any thing of his glory. This we have, Rom. iii. 25, "God set him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past." The remission of sins is the thing aimed at; but this must be so brought about as that therein not only the mercy but the righteousness of God may be declared, and therefore must it be brought forth by a propitiation, or making of an atonement in the blood of Christ: so John iii. 16; 1 John iv. 9; Rom. v. 8. This, I say, also lies in the mystery of that forgiveness that is administered in the gospel,—it comes forth from this eternal purpose of making way by the blood of Christ to the dispensation of pardon. And this greatly heightens the excellency of this discovery. Men who have slight thoughts of God, whose hearts were never awed with his dread or greatness, who never seriously considered his purity and holiness, may think it no great matter that God should pardon sin. But do they consider the way whereby it is to be brought about?—even by the sending of his only Son, and that to die, as we shall see afterward. Neither was there any other way whereby it might be done. Let us now lay aside common thoughts, assent upon reports and tradition, and rightly weigh this matter. Doubtless we shall find it to be a *great thing*, that forgiveness should be so with God as to be made out unto us (we know somewhat what we are) by sending his only Son to die. Oh, how little is this really believed, even by them who make a profession of it! and what mean thoughts are entertained about it when men seek for pardon! *Immunity from punishment* is the utmost that lies in the aims and desires of most, and is all that they are exercised in the consideration of, when they deal with God about sin. Such men think, and will do so, that we have an *easy task* in hand, —namely, to prove that there is forgiveness in God; but this ease lies in their own ignorance and darkness. If ever they come to search after it indeed, to inquire into the nature, reasons, causes, fountains, and springs of it, they will be able to give another account of these things. Christ is the centre of the mystery of the gospel, and forgiveness is laid up in the heart of Christ, from the love of the Father; in him are all the treasures of it hid. And surely it is no small

Digitized by Google

thing to have the heart of Christ revealed unto us. When believers deal about pardon, their faith exercises itself about this, that God, with whom the soul hath to do, hath sent the Lord Christ to die for this end, that it may be freely given out. General notions of impunity they dwell not on, they pass [press?] not for; they have a closer converse with God than to be satisfied with such thoughts. They inquire into the graciousness of his nature, and the good pleasure of his will, the purpose of his grace; they ponder and look into the mystery of his wisdom and love in sending his Son. If these springs be not clear unto them, the streams will yield them but little refreshment. It is not enough that we seek after salvation, but we are to inquire and search diligently into the nature and manner of it. These are the things that "the angels desire to" bow down and "look into," 1 Pet. i. 11, 12. And some think if they have got a form of words about them, they have gotten a sufficient comprehension of them! It is doubtless one reason why many who truly believe do yet so fluctuate about forgiveness all their days, that they never exercised faith to look into the springs of it, its eternal fountains, but have merely dwelt on actual condonation. However, I say, these things lie utterly out of the consideration of the common pretenders to an acquaintance with the truth we have in hand.

(2.) There is another sovereign act of God's will to be considered in this matter, and that is *his eternal designation of the persons who shall be made partakers of this mercy.* He hath not left this thing to hazard and uncertainties, that it should, as it were, be unknown to him who should be pardoned and who not. Nay, none ever are made partakers of forgiveness but those whom he hath eternally and graciously designed thereunto: so the apostle declares it, Eph. i. 5–7. The rise is his eternal predestination; the end, the glory of his grace; the means, redemption in the blood of Christ; the thing itself, forgiveness of sins. None ever are or can be made partakers thereof but by virtue of this act of God's will and grace; which thereupon hath a peculiar influence into it, and is to be respected in the consideration of it. I know this may be abused by pride, profaneness, and unbelief, and so may the whole work of God's grace,—and so it is, even the blood of Christ in an especial manner; but in its proper place and use it hath a signal influence into the glory of God and the consolation of the souls of men.

There are also other acts of this purpose of God's grace, as of giving sinners unto Christ and giving sinners an interest in Christ, which I shall not insist upon, because the nature of them is sufficiently discovered in that one explained already.

Secondly, Forgiveness hath respect unto the propitiation made

Digitized by Google

in and by the blood of Christ the Son of God. This was declared in the opening of the words. Indeed, here lies the knot and centre of gospel forgiveness. It flows from the cross, and springs out of the grave of Christ.

Thus Elihu describes it, Job xxxiii. 24, "God is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom." The whole of what is aimed at lies in these words:—1. There is *God's gracious and merciful heart* towards a sinner: "He is gracious unto him." 2. There is *actual condonation* itself, of which we shall treat afterward: "He saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit." And,—3. There is *the centre of the whole,* wherein God's gracious heart and actual pardon do meet; and that is the ransom, the propitiation or atonement that is in the blood of Christ, of which we speak: "I have found a ransom."

The same is expressed, Isa. liii. 11, "My righteous servant shall justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." Of the justification of sinners, *absolution* or pardon is the first part. This ariseth from Christ's bearing their iniquities. Therein he "finished the transgression, made an end of sins, and made reconciliation for iniquity," Dan. ix. 24. Even all the sacrifices, and so consequently the whole worship of the Old Testament, evinced this relation between forgiveness and blood-shedding; whence the apostle concludes that "without shedding of blood is no remission," Heb. ix. 22;—that is, all pardon ariseth from blood-shedding, even of the blood of the Son of God; so that we are said "in him to have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins," Eph. i. 7. Our redemption in his blood is our forgiveness: not that we are all actually pardoned in the blood of his cross, for thereunto must be added gospel condonation, of which afterward; but thereby it is procured, the grant of pardon is therein sealed, and security given that it shall in due time be made out unto us. To which purpose is that discourse of the apostle, Rom. iii. 24–26. The work there mentioned proceeds from grace, is managed to the interest of righteousness, is carried on by the blood of Christ, and issues in forgiveness. Now, the blood of Christ relates variously to the pardon of sin:—

1. *Pardon is purchased and procured by it.* Our redemption is our forgiveness, as the cause contains the effect. No soul is pardoned but with respect unto the blood of Christ as the procuring cause of that pardon. Hence he is said to have "washed us in his blood," Rev. i. 5; "by himself to have purged our sins," Heb. i. 3; "by one offering" to have taken away sin, and to have "perfected for ever them that are sanctified," Heb. x. 14; to be the ransom and "propitiation for our sins," 1 John ii. 2; to have "made an end of sins," Dan. ix. 24; and to have "made reconciliation for the sins of the

Digitized by Google

people," Heb. ii. 17. God hath enclosed his rich stores of pardon and mercy in the blood of Jesus.

2. Because *in his blood the promise of pardon is ratified and confirmed,* so that nothing is wanting to our complete forgiveness but our pleading the promise by faith in him: 2 Cor. i. 20, "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen;" that is, faithfully, and irrevocably, and immutably established. And therefore the apostle having told us that this is the covenant of God, that he would be "merciful to our sins and iniquities," Heb. viii. 12, he informs us that in the undertaking of Christ this covenant is become a testament, chap. ix. 15–17; so ratified in his blood, that mercy and forgiveness of sin is irrevocably confirmed unto us therein.

3. Because *he hath in his own person, as the head of the church, received an acquitment for the whole body.* His personal discharge, upon the accomplishment of his work, was a pledge of the discharge which was in due time to be given to his whole mystical body. Peter tells us, Acts ii. 24, that it was impossible he should be detained by death. And why so? Because death being penally inflicted on him, when he had paid the debt he was legally to be acquitted. Now, for whom and in whose name and stead he suffered, for them and in their name and stead he received this acquitment.

4. Because *upon his death, God the Father hath committed unto him the whole management of the business of forgiveness:* Acts v. 31, he now gives "repentance" and the "forgiveness of sins." It is Christ that forgives us, Col. iii. 13. All forgiveness is now at his disposal, and he pardoneth whom he will, even all that are given unto him of the Father, not casting out any that come to God by him. He is intrusted with all the stores of his Father's purpose and his own purchase; and thence tells us that "all things that the Father hath are his," John xvi. 15.

In all these respects doth forgiveness relate to the blood of Christ. Mercy, pardon, and grace could find no other way to issue forth from the heart of the Father but by the heart-blood of the Son; and so do they stream unto the heart of the sinner.

Two things are principally to be considered in the respect that forgiveness hath to the blood of Christ:—(1.) *The way of its procurement;* (2.) *The way of its administration by him.* The first is deep, mysterious, dreadful. It was by his blood, the blood of the cross, the travail of his soul, his undergoing wrath and curse. The other is gracious, merciful, and tender; whence so many things are spoken of his mercifulness and faithfulness, to encourage us to expect forgiveness from him.

This also adds to the mysterious depths of forgiveness, and makes its discovery a great matter. The soul that looks after it in earnest

Digitized by Google

must consider what it cost. How light do most men make of pardon! What an easy thing is it to be acquainted with it! and no very hard matter to obtain it! But to hold communion with God, in the blood of his Son, is a thing of another nature than is once dreamed of by many who think they know well enough what it is to be pardoned. "God be merciful," is a common saying; and as common to desire he would be so "for Christ's sake." Poor creatures are cast into the mould of such expressions, who know neither God, nor mercy, nor Christ, nor any thing of the mystery of the gospel. Others look on the outside of the cross. To see into the mystery of the love of the Father, working in the blood of the Mediator; to consider by faith the great transaction of divine wisdom, justice, and mercy therein,—how few attain unto it! To come unto God by Christ for forgiveness, and therein to behold the law issuing all its threats and curses in his blood, and losing its sting, putting an end to its obligation unto punishment, in the cross; to see all sins gathered up in the hands of God's justice, and made to meet on the Mediator, and eternal love springing forth triumphantly from his blood, flourishing into pardon, grace, mercy, forgiveness,—this the heart of a sinner can be enlarged unto only by the Spirit of God.

Thirdly, There is in forgiveness *free condonation*, discharge, or pardon, according to the tenor of the gospel; and this may be considered two ways:—

1. As it lies in the *promise itself;* and so it is God's gracious declaration of pardon to sinners, in and by the blood of Christ, his covenant to that end and purpose, which is variously proposed, according as he knew [to be] needful for all the ends and purposes of ingenerating faith, and communicating that consolation which he intends therein.

This is the law of his grace, the declaration of the mystery of his love, before insisted on.

2. There is the *bringing home and application of all this mercy to the soul of a sinner by the Holy Ghost*, wherein we are freely forgiven all our trespasses, Col. ii. 13.

Gospel forgiveness I say, respects all these things, these principles; they have all an influence into it. And that which makes this more evident (wherewith I shall close this consideration of the nature of it), is, that faith, in its application of itself unto God about and for forgiveness, doth distinctly apply itself unto and close with sometimes one of these severally and singly, sometimes another, and sometimes jointly takes in the consideration of them all expressly. Not that at any time it fixes on any or either of them exclusively to the others, but that eminently it finds some special encouragement at some season, and some peculiar attractive, from some one of them, more than from the rest; and then that proves an inlet, a door of en-

Digitized by Google

trance, unto the treasures that are laid up in the rest of them. Let us go over the severals by instances:—

(1.) Sometimes faith fixes upon *the name and infinite goodness of the nature of God*, and draws out forgiveness from thence. So doth the psalmist: Ps. lxxxvi. 5, "Thou, Lord, art good and ready to forgive." He rolls himself, in the pursuit and expectation of pardon, on the infinite goodness of the nature of God. So Neh. ix. 17, "Thou art a God of pardons," or ready to forgive,—of an infinite gracious, loving nature,—not severe and wrathful; and this is that which we are encouraged unto, Isa. l. 10, to stay on the name of God, as in innumerable other places.

And thus faith oftentimes finds a peculiar sweetness and encouragement in and from the consideration of God's gracious nature. Sometimes this is the first thing it fixes on, and sometimes the last that it rests in. And ofttimes it makes a stay here, when it is driven from all other holds; it can say, however it be, "Yet God is gracious;" and at least make that conclusion which we have from it, Joel ii. 13, 14, "God is gracious and merciful; who knoweth but he will return?" And when faith hath well laid hold on this consideration, it will not easily be driven from its expectation of relief and forgiveness even from hence.

(2.) Sometimes the soul by faith addresseth itself in a peculiar manner to *the sovereignty of God's will*, whereby he is gracious to whom he will be gracious, and merciful to whom he will be merciful; which, as was showed, is another considerable spring or principle of forgiveness. This way David's faith steered him in his great strait and perplexity: 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26, "If I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again. But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him." That which he hath in consideration is whether God hath any delight in him or no; that is, whether God would graciously remit and pardon the great sin against which at that time he manifesteth his indignation. Here he lays himself down before the sovereign grace of God, and awaits patiently the discovery of the free act of his will concerning him; and at this door, as it were, enters into the consideration of those other springs of pardon which faith inquires after and closeth withal. This sometimes is all the cloud that appears to a distressed soul, which after a while fills the heavens by the addition of the other considerations mentioned, and yields plentiful refreshing showers. And this condition is a sin-entangled soul ofttimes reduced unto in looking out for relief,—it can discover nothing but this, that God is able, and can, if he graciously please, relieve and acquit him. All other supportments, all springs of relief, are shut up or hid from him. The springs, indeed, may be nigh, as

Digitized by Google

that was to Hagar, but their eyes are withheld that they cannot see them. Wherefore they cast themselves on God's sovereign pleasure, and say with Job, "'Though he slay us, yet will we trust in him;' we will not let him go. In ourselves we are lost, that is unquestionable. How the Lord will deal with us we know not; we see not our signs and tokens any more. Evidences of God's grace in us, or of his love and favour unto us, are all out of sight. To a present special interest in Christ we are strangers; and we lie every moment at the door of eternity. What course shall we take? what way shall we proceed? If we abide at a distance from God, we shall assuredly perish. 'Who ever hardened himself against him and prospered?' Nor is there the least relief to be had but from and by him, 'for who can forgive sins but God?' We will, then, bring our guilty souls into his presence, and attend the pleasure of his grace; what he speaks concerning us, we will willingly submit unto." And this sometimes proves an anchor to a tossed soul, which, though it gives it not rest and peace, yet it saves it from the rock of despair. Here it abides until light do more and more break forth upon it.

(3.) Faith dealing about forgiveness doth commonly eye, in a particular manner, its *relation to the mediation and blood of Christ.* So the apostle directs, 1 John ii. 1, 2, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins." If any one hath sinned, and is in depths and entanglements about it, what course shall he take, how shall he proceed, to obtain deliverance? Why, he must unto God for pardon. But what shall he rely upon to encourage him in his so doing? Saith the apostle, "Consider by faith the atonement and propitiation made for sin by the blood of Christ, and that he is still pursuing the work of love to the suing out of pardon for us; and rest thy soul thereon." This, I say, most commonly is that which faith in the first place immediately fixes on.

(4.) Faith eyes *actual pardon or condonation.* So God proposeth it as a motive to farther believing: Isa. xliv. 22, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." Actual pardon of sin is proposed to faith as an encouragement unto a full returning unto God in all things, 2 Sam. xxiii. 5. And the like may be said of all the other particulars which we have insisted on. There is not any of them but will yield peculiar relief unto a soul dealing with God about forgiveness, as having some one special concernment or other of forgiveness inwrapped in them;—only, as I said, they do it not exclusively, but are the special doors whereby believing enters into the whole. And these things must be spoken unto afterward.

Let us now take along with us the end for which all these consi-

Digitized by Google

derations have been insisted on. It is to manifest that a real discovery of gospel forgiveness is a matter of greater consequence and importance than at first proposal, it may be, it appeared unto some to be. Who is not in hopes, in expectation of pardon? Who think not that they know well enough at least what it is, if they might but obtain it? But men may have general thoughts of impunity, and yet be far enough from any saving acquaintance with gospel mercy.

Forgiveness discovered or revealed only to faith—Reasons thereof.

For a close of this discourse, I shall only add what is included in that proposition which is the foundation of the whole,—namely, that *this discovery of forgiveness is and can be made to faith alone.* The nature of it is such as that nothing else can discover it or receive it. No reasonings, no inquiries of the heart of man can reach unto it. That guess or glimpse which the heathens had of old of somewhat so called, and which false worshippers have at present, is not the forgiveness we insist upon, but a mere imagination of their own hearts.

This the apostle informs us, Rom. i. 17, "The righteousness of God is" (in the gospel) "revealed from faith to faith." Nothing but faith hath any thing to do with it. It is that righteousness of God whereof he speaks that consists in the forgiveness of sins by the blood of Christ, declared in the gospel. And this is revealed from the faith of God in the promise to the faith of the believer,—to him that mixes the promise with faith. And again more fully, 1 Cor. ii. 9, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." The ways whereby we may come to the knowledge of any thing are, by the seeing of the eye or hearing of the ear, or the reasonings and meditations of the heart; but now none of these will reach to the matter in hand,—by none of these ways can we come to an acquaintance with the things of the gospel that are prepared for us in Christ. How, then, shall we obtain the knowledge of them? That he declares, verse 10, "God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." Now, it is faith only that receives the revelations of the Spirit; nothing else hath to do with them.

To give evidence hereunto, we may consider that this great mystery,—1. Is too *deep*, 2. Is too *great*, for aught else to discover; and, —3. That nothing else but faith is *suited* to the making of this discovery.

1. It is *too deep and mysterious to be fathomed and reached by any thing else.* Reason's line is too short to fathom the depths of the

Digitized by Google

Father's love, of the blood of the Son, and the promises of the gospel built thereon, wherein forgiveness dwells. Men cannot by their rational considerations launch out into these deeps, nor draw water by them from these "wells of salvation." Reason stands by amazed, and cries, "How can these things be?" It can but gather cockle-shells, like him of old, at the shore of this ocean, a few criticisms upon the outward letter, and so bring an evil report upon the land, as did the spies. All it can do is but to hinder faith from venturing into it, crying, "Spare thyself; this attempt is vain, these things are impossible." It is among the things that faith puts off and lays aside when it engageth the soul into this great work. This, then, that it may come to a discovery of forgiveness, causeth the soul to deny itself and all its own reasonings, and to give up itself to an infinite fulness of goodness and truth. Though it cannot go unto the bottom of these depths, yet it enters into them, and finds rest in them. Nothing but faith is suited to rest, to satiate, and content itself in mysterious, bottomless, unsearchable depths. Being a soul-emptying, a reason-denying grace, the more it meets withal beyond its search and reach, the more satisfaction it finds. "This is that which I looked for," saith faith, "even for that which is infinite and unsearchable, when I know that there is abundantly more beyond me that I do not comprehend, than what I have attained unto; for I know that nothing else will do good to the soul." Now, this is that which really puzzles and overwhelms reason, rendering it useless. What it cannot compass, it will neglect or despise. It is either amazed and confounded, and dazzled like weak eyes at too great a light; or fortifying of itself by inbred pride and obstinacy, it concludes that this preaching of the cross, of forgiveness from the love of God, by the blood of Christ, is plain folly, a thing not for a wise man to take notice of or to trouble himself about: so it appeared to the wise Greeks of old, 1 Cor. i. 23. Hence, when a soul is brought under the power of a real conviction of sin, so as that it would desirously be freed from the galling entanglements of it, it is then the hardest thing in the world to persuade such a soul of this forgiveness. Any thing appears more rational unto it,—any self-righteousness in this world, any purgatory hereafter.

The greatest part of the world of convinced persons have forsaken forgiveness on this account; masses, penances, merits, have appeared more eligible. Yea, men who have no other desire but to be forgiven do choose to close with any thing rather than forgiveness. If men do escape these rocks, and resolve that nothing but pardon will relieve them, yet it is impossible for them to receive it in the truth and power of it, if not enabled by faith thereunto. I speak not of men that take it up by hear-say, as a common report, but of those

Digitized by Google

souls who find themselves really concerned to look after it. When they know it is their sole concernment, all their hope and relief; when they know that they must perish everlastingly without it; and when it is declared unto them in the words of truth and soberness,—yet they cannot receive it. What is the reason of it? what staves off these hungry creatures from their proper food? Why, they have nothing to lead them into the mysterious depths of eternal love, of the blood of Christ, and promises of the gospel. How may we see poor deserted souls standing every day at the side of this pool, and yet not once venture themselves into it all their days!

2. *It is too great for any thing else to discover.* Forgiveness is a thing chosen out of God from all eternity, to exalt and magnify the glory of his grace; and it will be made appear to all the world at the day of judgment to have been a great thing. When the soul comes in any measure to be made sensible of it, it finds it so great, so excellent and astonishable, that it sinks under the thoughts of it. It hath dimensions, a length, breadth, depth, and height, that no line of the rational soul can take or measure. There is "exceeding greatness" in it, Eph. i. 19. That is a great work which we have prescribed, Eph. iii. 19, even "to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." Here, I suppose, reason will confess itself at a stand and an issue; to know that which passeth knowledge is none of its work. "It cannot be known," saith reason; and so ends the matter. But this is faith's proper work, even to know that which passeth knowledge; to know that, in its power, virtue, sweetness, and efficacy, which cannot be thoroughly known in its nature and excellency; to have, by believing, all the ends of a full comprehension of that which cannot be fully comprehended. Hence, Heb. xi. 1, it is said to be the ὑπόστασις of "things not seen," their subsistence; though in themselves absent, yet faith gives them a present subsistence in the soul. So it knows things that pass knowledge; by mixing itself with them, it draws out and communicates their benefit to the soul. From all which is evident what in *the third place* was proposed, of faith's being only suited to be the means of this discovery; so that I shall not need farther to insist thereon.

Discovery of forgiveness in God a great supportment to sin-entangled souls—Particular assurance attainable.

FOURTHLY. THERE yet remains a brief confirmation of the position[1] at first laid down and thus cleared, before I come to the improve-

[1] Our author seems to deviate from the order of the four principal propositions, as arranged on page 384, when he begins the exposition of this verse. He now illustrates the fourth proposition, and afterwards considers the third. See page 427.—ED.

Digitized by Google

ment of the words, especially aimed at. I say, then, *this discovery of forgiveness in God is a great supportment for a sin-entangled soul, although it hath no special persuasion of its own particular interest therein.* Somewhat is supposed in this assertion, and somewhat affirmed.

First, [As to what is supposed]:—

1. It is *supposed* that there may be a gracious persuasion and assurance of faith in a man concerning his own *particular interest* in forgiveness. A man may, many do, believe it for themselves, so as not only to have the benefit of it but the comfort also. Generally, all the saints mentioned in Scripture had this assurance, unless it were in the case of depths, distresses, and desertions, such as that in this psalm. David expresseth his confidence of the love and favour of God unto his own soul hundreds of times; Paul doth the same for himself: Gal. ii. 20, "Christ loved me, and gave himself for me;" 2 Tim. iv. 8, "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day." And that this boasting in the Lord and his grace was not an enclosure to himself he shows, Rom. viii. 38, 39.

Nothing can be more vain than what is usually pleaded to remove this sheet-anchor of the saints' consolation,—namely, that *no man's particular name is in the promise.* It is not said to this or that man by name that his sins are forgiven him; but the matter is far otherwise. To think that it is necessary that the names whereby we are known among ourselves, and are distinguished here one from another, should be written in the promise, that we may believe in particular every child of God is in the promise, is a fond conceit. And believing makes it very legible to him. Yea, we find by experience that there is no need of argumentation in this case. The soul, by a direct act of faith, believes its own forgiveness, without making inferences or gathering conclusions; and may do so upon the proposition of it to be believed in the promise. But I will not digress from my work in hand, and, therefore, shall only observe one or two things upon the supposition laid down:—

(1.) It is *the duty of every believer to labour after an assurance of a personal interest in forgiveness,* and to be diligent in the cherishing and preservation of it when it is attained. The apostle exhorts us all unto it, Heb. x. 22, "Let us draw near in full assurance of faith;" that is, of our acceptance with God through forgiveness in the blood of Jesus. This he plainly discourseth of; and this principle of our faith and confidence he would have us to hold fast unto the end, chap. iii. 14. It is no small evil in believers not to be pressing after perfection in believing and obedience. Ofttimes some sinful indulgence to self, or the world, or sloth, is the cause of it.

Digitized by Google

Hence few come up to gospel assurance. But yet most of our privileges, and upon the matter all our comforts, depend on this one thing. A little by the way, to encourage unto this duty, I shall desire you to consider both whence this assurance is produced and what it doth produce,—what it is the fruit of, and what fruit it bears:—

[1.] It is, in general, the product of *a more plentiful communication of the Spirit* than ordinary, as to a sense and participation of the choice fruits of the death of Christ, procured for those who are justified by their acceptance of the atonement. It flourisheth not without his sealing, witnessing, establishing, and shedding abroad the love of God in our hearts. See Rom. v. 1–5. And what believer ought not to long for and press after the enjoyment of these things? Nay, to read of these things in the gospel, not experiencing them in our own hearts, and yet to sit down quietly on this side of them, without continual pressing after them, is to despise the blood of Christ, the Spirit of grace, and the whole work of God's love. If there are no such things, the gospel is not true; if there are, if we press not after them, we are despisers of the gospel. Surely he hath not the Spirit who would not have more of him, all of him that is promised by Christ. These things are the "hundredfold" that Christ hath left us in the world to counterpoise our sorrows, troubles, and losses; and shall we be so foolish as to neglect our only abiding riches and treasures,—in particular, as it is the product of an exercised, vigorous, active faith? That our faith should be such always, in every state and condition, I suppose it our duty to endeavour. Not only our comforts but our obedience also depends upon it. The more faith that is true and of the right kind, the more obedience; for all our obedience is the obedience of faith.

[2.] For *its own fruit*, and what it produceth, they are the choicest actings of our souls towards God,—as love, delight, rejoicing in the Lord, peace, joy, and consolation in ourselves, readiness to do or suffer, cheerfulness in so doing. If they grow not from this root, yet their flourishing wholly depends upon it; so that surely it is the duty of every believer to break through all difficulties in pressing after this particular assurance. The objections that persons raise against themselves in this case may be afterward considered.

(2.) In *ordinary dispensations of God* towards us, and dealings with us, *it is mostly* [*by*] *our own negligence and sloth* that we come short of this assurance. It is true it depends in a peculiar manner on the sovereignty of God. He is as absolute in giving peace to believers as in giving grace to sinners. This takes place and may be proposed as a relief in times of trial and distress. He createth light and causeth darkness, as he pleaseth. But yet, considering what promises are made unto us, what encouragements are given us, what love and

Digitized by Google

tenderness there is in God to receive us, I cannot but conclude that ordinarily the cause of our coming short of this assurance is where I have fixed it. And this is the first thing that is supposed in the foregoing assertion.

2. *It is supposed that there is or may be a saving persuasion or discovery of forgiveness in God, where there is no assurance of any particular interest therein,* or that our own sins in particular are pardoned. This is that which hath a promise of gracious acceptance with God, and is therefore saving: Isa. l. 10, "Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God." Here is the fear of the Lord and obedience, with a blessed encouragement to rest in God and his all-sufficiency, yet no assurance nor light, but darkness, and that walked in or continued in for a long season; for he cannot walk in darkness, meet with nothing but darkness, without any beam or ray of light, as the words signify, who is persuaded of the love of God in the pardon of his sins. And yet the faith of such a one, and his obedience springing from it, have this gracious promise of acceptance with God. And innumerable testimonies to this purpose might be produced, and instances in great plenty. I shall only tender a little evidence unto it, in one observation concerning the nature of faith, and one more about the proposal of the thing to be believed, or forgiveness. And,—

(1.) Faith is called, and is, a cleaving unto the Lord: Deut. iv. 4, "Ye that did cleave," or adhere, "unto the LORD;" that is, who did believe. Josh. xxiii. 8, "Cleave," or adhere, "unto the LORD your God." The same word is used also in the New Testament: Acts xi. 23, "He exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord," or continue steadfast in believing. It is also often expressed by trusting in the Lord, rolling our burden, or casting our care upon him, by committing ourselves or our ways unto him. Now, all this goes no farther than the soul's resignation of itself unto God, to be dealt withal by him according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, ratified in the blood of Christ. This a soul *cannot do*, without a discovery of forgiveness in God; but this a soul *may do*, without a special assurance of his own interest therein. This faith, that thus adheres to God, that cleaves to him, will carry men to conclude that it is their duty and their wisdom to give up the disposal of their souls unto God, and to cleave and adhere unto him as revealed in Christ, waiting the pleasure of his will. It enables them to make Christ their choice; and will carry men to heaven safely, though it may be at some seasons not very comfortably.

(2.) The revelation and discovery of forgiveness that is made in the gospel evidenceth the same truth. The first proposal of it or con-

Digitized by Google

cerning it is not to any man that his sins are forgiven. No; but it is only that there is redemption and forgiveness of sins in Christ. So the apostle lays it down, Acts xiii. 38, 39, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." All this may be believed without a man's assurance of his own personal interest in the things mentioned. Now, where they are believed with the faith the gospel requires, that faith is saving, and the root of gospel, acceptable obedience. The ransom, I say, the atonement by Christ, the fulness of the redemption that is in him, and so forgiveness in his blood for believers, from the good will, grace, and love of the Father, is the first gospel discovery that a sinner in a saving manner closeth withal. Particular assurance ariseth or may arise afterward; and this also is supposed in the assertion.

Secondly, That which is *affirmed* in it is, that *a discovery of forgiveness in God, without any particular assurance of personal interest therein, is a great supportment to a sin-entangled soul.* And let no man despise the day of this small thing; small in the eyes of some, and those good men also, as if it did not deserve the name of faith. Now, as hath been made to appear, this discovery of forgiveness is the soul's persuasion, on gospel grounds, that however it be with him, and whatever his state and condition be, or is like to be, yet that God in his own nature is infinitely gracious, and that he hath determined, in a sovereign act of his will from eternity, to be gracious to sinners, and that he hath made way for the administration of forgiveness by the blood of his Son, according as he hath abundantly manifested and declared in the promises of the gospel. "However it be with me, yet thus it is with God; there is forgiveness with him." This is the first thing that a soul in its depths riseth up unto; and it is a supportment for it, enabling it unto all present duties until consolation come from above.

Thus hath it been to and with the saints of old: Hos. xiv. 3, "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy." A solemn renunciation we have of all other helps, reliefs, or assistances, civil or religious, that are not God's; thereon a solemn resolution, in their great distress, of cleaving unto God alone;—both which are great and blessed effects of faith. What is the bottom and foundation of this blessed resolution?—namely, that proposition, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy;" that is, "There is forgiveness with thee for helpless sinners." This lifted up their hearts in their depths, and supported them in waiting unto the receiving of the blessed promises of mercy, pardon, grace,

Digitized by Google

and holiness, which ensue in the next verses. Until they came home unto them in their efficacy and effects, they made a life on this, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy."

The state and condition of things seem to lie yet lower in that proposal we have, Joel ii. 13, 14, "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing?" That which is proposed to the faith of those here spoken unto is, that the Lord is gracious and merciful,—that there is forgiveness in him. The duty they are provoked unto hereupon is gospel repentance. The assent unto the proposition demanded, as to their own interest, amounts but unto this, "Who knows but that the LORD may return, and leave a blessing?" or, "deal with us according to the manifestation he hath made of himself, that he is merciful and gracious." This is far enough from any comfortable persuasion of a particular interest in that grace, mercy, or pardon. But yet, saith the prophet, "Come but thus far, and here is a firm foundation of dealing with God about farther discoveries of himself in a way of grace and mercy." When a soul sees but so much in God as to conclude, "Well, who knoweth but that he may return, and have mercy upon me also?" it will support him, and give him an entrance into farther light.

The church in the Lamentations gives a sad account of her state and condition in this matter; for she maketh that hard conclusion against herself, chap. iii. 18, "My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD. . . . . Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer," verse 8. So far is she from a comfortable persuasion of a particular interest in mercy and acceptance, that, under her pressures and in her temptations, she is ready positively to determine on the other side, namely, that she is rejected and cast off for ever. What course, then, shall she take? Shall she give over waiting on God, and say, "There is no hope?" "No," saith she, "I will not take that way; for (verse 26) 'It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God.'" But yet there seems small encouragement for her so to do if things be with her as was expressed. "Things, indeed," saith she, "are very sad with me. 'My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is bowed down in me,' verse 20; but yet somewhat 'I recall to mind, and therefore have I hope,' verse 21,—'It is of the LORD'S mercy that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.' [verse 22.] There is mercy and never-failing compassion in God, so that though my own present condition be full of darkness, and I see no deliverance, yet I purpose still to abide waiting on him. Who knows what those infinite stores and treasures

Digitized by Google

of mercy and relief that are with him may at length afford unto me?" And many instances of the like kind may be added.

We may observe, by the way, how far this relief extends itself, and what it enables the soul unto; as,—

1. The soul is enabled thereby to *resign itself unto the disposal of sovereign grace in self-abhorrency*, and a renunciation of all other ways of relief: Lam. iii. 29, "He putteth his mouth in the dust, if so be there may be hope." "What God will," is his language. Here he lies at his disposal, humble, broken, but abiding his pleasure. "Though he slay me," saith Job, "yet will I trust in him," chap. xiii. 15;—"It is all one how he deals with me; whatever be the event, I will abide cleaving unto him. I will not think of any other way of extricating myself from my distress. I will neither fly like Jonah, nor hide like Adam, nor take any other course for deliverance." Saith the soul, "'God is a God that hideth himself' from me, Isa. xlv. 15; 'I walk in darkness and have no light,' chap. l. 10. 'My flesh faileth and my heart faileth,' Ps. lxxiii. 26; so that I am overwhelmed with trouble. 'Mine iniquities have taken such hold on me that I cannot look up,' Ps. xl. 12. 'The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.' [Isa. xlix. 14.] Every day am I in dread and terror, and I am ready utterly to faint, and no relief can I obtain. What, then, shall I do? Shall I 'curse God and die?' or cry, 'This evil is of the LORD; why should I wait for him any longer?' Shall I take the course of the world, and, seeing it will be no better, be wholly regardless of my latter end? No; I know, whatever my lot and portion be, that there is forgiveness with God. This and that poor man trusted in him; they cried unto him, and were delivered. So did David in his greatest distress; he encouraged his heart in the Lord his God, 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26. It is good for me to cast myself into his arms. It may be he will frown; it may be he is wroth still: but all is one, this way I will go. As it seems good unto him to deal with me, so let it be." And unspeakable are the advantages which a soul obtains by this self-resignation, which the faith treated of will infallibly produce.

2. It extends itself unto *a resolution of waiting in the condition wherein the soul is.* This the church comes unto, Lam. iii. 26, "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD;"—"I will not give over my expectation, I will not make haste nor limit God; but I will lie at his feet until his own appointed time of mercy shall come." Expectation and quietness make up waiting. These the soul attains unto with this supportment. It looks upwards, "as a servant that looks to the hands of his master," still fixed on God, to see what he will do, to hear what he will speak concerning him; missing no season, no opportunity

Digitized by Google

wherein any discovery of the will of God may be made to him. And this he doth in quietness, without repining or murmuring, turning all his complaints against himself and his own vileness, that hath cut him short from a participation of that fulness of love and grace which is with God. That this effect also attends this faith will fully appear in the close of the psalm.

3. It supports unto *waiting in the use of all means for the attainment of a sense of forgiveness*, and so hath its effect in the whole course of our obedience. "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." To fear the Lord, is an expression comprehensive of his whole worship and all our duty. "This I am encouraged unto, in my depths," saith the psalmist, "because there is forgiveness with thee. I will abide in all duties, in all the ways of thy worship, wherein thou mayst be found." And however it be for a while, the latter end of that soul, who thus abideth with God, will be peace.

Let us, then, nextly see by what ways and means it yields this supportment:—

1. It begets a *liking of God in the soul*, and consequently *some love unto him*. The soul apprehends God as one infinitely to be desired and delighted in by those who have a share in forgiveness. It cannot but consider him as good and gracious, however its own estate be hazardous. Ps. lxxiii. 1, 2, "Yet God is good to Israel, to such as are of a clean heart. As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped;"—"However the state stands with me, yet I know that God is good, good to Israel; and therewith shall I support myself." When once this ground is got upon the soul, that it considers God in Christ as one to be delighted in and loved, great and blessed effects will ensue:—(1.) Self-abhorrency and condemnation, with resignation of all to God, and permanency therein, do certainly attend it. (2.) Still, somewhat or other in God will be brought to mind to relieve it under faintings, some new springs of hope will be every day opened. (3.) And the soul will be insensibly wrought upon to delight itself in dealing with God. Though, in its own particular, it meets with frownings, chidings, and repulses, yet this still relieves him, that God is so as hath been declared; so that he says, "However it be, yet God is good; and it is good for me to wait upon him." Without this discovery the soul likes not God, and whatever it doth with respect unto him, it is because it dares do no otherwise, being overawed with his terror and greatness; and such obedience God may have from devils.

2. It *removes sundry overwhelming difficulties* that lie in the soul's way before it close with this discovery of forgiveness; as,—

(1.) It takes away all those *hinderances* that were formerly insisted on from the greatness, holiness, and severity of God, the inexor-

Digitized by Google

ableness and strictness of the law, and the natural actings of conscience rising up against all hopes of forgiveness. All these are by this faith removed, and taken out of the way. Where this faith is, it discovers not only *forgiveness*, as hath been showed, but also *the true nature of gospel forgiveness;* it reveals it as flowing from the gracious heart of the Father, through the blood of the Son. Now, this propitiation in the blood of the Son removeth all these difficulties, even antecedently unto our special sense of an interest therein. It shows how all the properties of God may be exalted and the law fulfilled, and yet forgiveness given out to sinners. And herein lies no small advantage unto a soul in its approaches unto God. All those dreadful apprehensions of God, which were wont to beset him in the first thoughts of coming to him, are now taken out of the way, so that he can quietly apply himself unto his own particular concernments before him.

(2.) In particular, it removes *the overwhelming consideration of the unspeakable greatness of sin.* This presseth the soul to death, when once the heart is possessed with it. Were not their sins so great, such as no heart can imagine or tongue declare, it might possibly be well with them, say distressed sinners. They are not so troubled that they are sinners, as that they are great sinners; not that these and those sins they are guilty of, but that they are great sins, attended with fearful aggravations. Otherwise they could deal well enough with them. Now, though this discovery free men not from the entanglement of their sins as theirs, yet it doth from the whole entanglement of their sins as great and many. This consideration may be abstracted. The soul sees enough in God to forgive great sins, though it doth not as yet to forgive his sins. That great sins shall be pardoned, this discovery puts out of question. Whether his sins shall be pardoned is now all the inquiry. Whatever any faith can do, that this faith will do, unless it be the making of particular application of the things believed unto itself. The soul, then, can no longer justly be troubled about the greatness of sin; the infiniteness of forgiveness that he sees in God will relieve him against it. All that remains is, that it is his own sin about which he hath to deal; whereof afterwards. These and the like difficulties are removed by it.

3. It gives *some life in and encouragement unto duty.* And that, first, unto *duty as duty.* Eyeing God by faith, in such a fulness of grace, the soul cannot but be encouraged to meet him in every way of duty, and to lay hold upon him thereby;—every way leading to him, *as leading to him,* must be well liked and approved of. And, secondly, to all duties. And herein lies no small advantage. God is oftentimes found in duties, but in what, or of what kind, he will be

Digitized by Google

found of any one in particular, is uncertain. This faith puts the soul on all: so it did the spouse in the parallel to that in hand, Cant. iii. 2–4. Now, what supportment may be hence obtained is easily apprehended,—supportment not from them or by them, but in them, as the means of intercourse between God and the soul.

From these effects of this discovery of forgiveness in God *three* things will ensue, which are sufficient to maintain the spiritual life of the soul:—

(1.) A *resolution to abide with God, and to commit all unto him.* This the word, as was observed, teaches us: "There is forgiveness with thee, and therefore thou shalt be feared;"—"Because this I found, this I am persuaded of, therefore I will abide with him in the way of his fear and worship." This our Saviour calls unto, John xv. 4, "'Abide in me;' except ye do so ye can bear no fruit." So the Lord, representing his taking of the church unto himself under the type of the prophet's taking an adulteress in vision, doth it on these terms: Hos. iii. 3, "Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee." Now, this abiding with God intimates two things:—[1.] Oppositions, solicitations, and temptations unto the contrary. [2.] Forbearing to make any other choice, as unto that end for which we abide with God.

[1.] It argues *oppositions.* To abide, to be stable and permanent, is to be so against oppositions. Many discouragements are ready to rise up in the soul against it: in *fears* especially that it shall not hold out, that it shall be rejected at last, that all is naught and hypocritical with it, that it shall not be forgiven, that God indeed regards it not, and therefore it may well enough give over its hopes, which seems often as the giving up of the ghost; [these] will assault it. Again, oppositions arise from corruptions and temptations unto sin, contrary to the life of faith; and these often proceed to a high degree of prevalency, so that the guilt contracted upon them is ready to cast the soul quite out of all expectation of mercy. "I shall one day perish by these means," saith the soul, "if I am not already lost."

But now, where faith hath made this discovery of forgiveness, the soul will abide with God against all these discouragements and oppositions. It will not leave him, it will not give over waiting for him. So David expresseth the matter in the instance of himself: Ps. lxxiii. 2, "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped:" and, verse 13, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain." But yet, after all his conflicts, this at last he comes unto, verse 26, "Though 'my flesh and my heart faileth,' yet (verse 28) 'It is good for me to draw near unto God;'—I will yet abide

Digitized by Google

with God; I will not let go his fear nor my profession. Although I walk weakly, lamely, unevenly, yet I will still follow after him." As it was with the disciples, when many, upon a strong temptation, went back from Christ, and walked no more with him, "Jesus said unto them, Will ye also go away?" to which Peter replies, in the name of the rest of them, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life," John vi. 66–68;—"It is thus and thus with me," saith the soul; "I am tossed and afflicted, and not comforted; little life, little strength, real guilt, many sins, and much disconsolation." "What then?" saith God by his word; "wilt thou also go away?" "No," saith the soul; "there is forgiveness with thee; thou hast the words of eternal life, and therefore I will abide with thee."

[2.] This *abiding with God argues a forbearance of any other choice.* Whilst the soul is in this condition, having not attained any evidences of its own special interest in forgiveness, many lovers will be soliciting of it to play the harlot by taking them into its embraces. Both self-righteousness and sin will be very importunate in this matter. The former tenders itself as exceeding useful to give the soul some help, assistance, and supportment in its condition. "Samuel doth not come," saith Saul, "and the Philistines invade me; I will venture and offer sacrifice myself, contrary to the law." The promise doth not come to the soul for its particular relief; it hath no evidence as to an especial interest in forgiveness. Temptation invades the mind: "Try thyself," says it, "to take relief in somewhat of thine own providing." And this is to play the harlot from God. To this purpose self-righteousness variously disguises itself, like the wife of Jeroboam when she went to the prophet. Sometimes it appears as duty, sometimes as signs and tokens; but its end is to get somewhat of the faith and trust of the soul to be fixed upon it. But when the soul hath indeed a discovery of forgiveness, it will not give ear to these solicitations. "No," saith it; "I see such a beauty, such an excellency, such a desirableness and suitableness unto my wants and condition, in that forgiveness that is with God, that I am resolved to abide in the gospel desire and expectation of it all the days of my life; here my choice is fixed, and I will not alter." And this resolution gives glory to the grace of God. When the soul, without an evidence of an interest in it, yet prefers it above that which, with many reasonings and pretences, offers itself as a present relief unto it, hereby is God glorified, and Christ exalted, and the spiritual life of the soul secured.

(2.) This discovery of forgiveness in God, with the effects of it before mentioned, will produce *a resolution of waiting on God for peace and consolation* in his own time and way. "He that believeth shall not make haste," Isa. xxviii. 16. Not make haste, to what? Not

Digitized by Google

to the enjoyment of the thing believed. Haste argues precipitation and impatience; this the soul that hath this discovery is freed from, resolving to wait the time of God's appointment for peace and consolation. God, speaking of his accomplishment of his promises, says, "I the LORD will hasten it," Isa. lx. 22. Well, then, if God will hasten it, may not we hasten to it? "Nay," saith he, "I will hasten it, but in its time." All oppositions and impediments considered, it shall be hastened, but in its time, its due time, its appointed time. And this the soul is to wait for; and so it will. As when Jacob had seen the beauty of Rachel, and loved her, he was contented to wait seven years for the enjoyment of her to be his wife, and thought no time long, no toil too hard, that he might obtain her; so the soul having discovered the beauty and excellency of forgiveness as it is with God, as it is in his gracious heart, in his eternal purpose, in the blood of Christ, in the promise of the gospel, is resolved to wait quietly and patiently for the time wherein God will clear up unto it its own personal interest therein. Even one experimental embracement of it, even at the hour of death, doth well deserve the waiting and obedience of the whole course of a man's life.

And this the psalmist manifests to have been the effect produced in his heart and spirit; for upon this discovery of forgiveness in God, he resolved both to wait upon him himself, and encourageth others so to do.

(3.) This *prepares the soul for the receiving of that consolation* and deliverance out of its pressures, by an evidence of a special interest in forgiveness, which it waiteth for:—

[1.] For this makes men to *hearken after it.* It makes the soul like the merchant who hath great riches, all his wealth, in a far country, which he is endeavouring to bring home safe unto him. If they come, he is well provided for; if they miscarry, he is lost and undone. This makes him hearken after tidings that they are safe there; and, as Solomon says, "Good news," in this case, "from a far country, is as cold waters to a thirsty soul," Prov. xxv. 25,—full of refreshment. Though he cannot look upon them as his own yet absolutely, because he hath them not in possession, he is glad they are safe there. So is it with the soul. These riches that it so values are as to its apprehensions in a far country. So is the promise, that "he shall behold the land that is very far off," Isa. xxxiii. 17. He is glad to hear news that they are safe, to hear forgiveness preached, and the promises insisted on, though he cannot as yet look upon them as his own. The merchant rests not here, but he hearkeneth with much solicitousness after the things that should bring home his riches, especially if they have in them his all. Hence such ships are called *ships of desire,* Job ix. 26. Such a man greatly desires the speeding of them

Digitized by Google

to their port. He considers the wind and the weather, all the occasions, and inconveniences, and dangers of the way; and blame him not,—his all is at stake. The soul doth so in like manner: it hearkeneth after all the ways and means whereby this forgiveness may be particularly brought home unto it; is afraid of sin and of temptation, glad to find a fresh gale of the Spirit of grace, hoping that it may bring in his return from the land of promise. This prepares the heart for a spiritual sense of it when it is revealed.

[2.] It so prepares the soul, by *giving it a due valuation of the grace and mercy desired.* The merchantman in the gospel was not prepared to enjoy the pearl himself, until it was discovered to him to be of great price; then he knew how to purchase it, procure it, and keep it. The soul having, by this acting of faith, upon the discovery of forgiveness insisted on, come to find that the pearl hid in the field is indeed precious, is both stirred up to seek after possession of it, and to give it its due. Saith such a soul, "How excellent, how precious is this forgiveness that is with God! Blessed, yea, ever blessed, are they who are made partakers of it! What a life of joy, rest, peace, and consolation do they lead! Had I but their evidence of an interest in it, and the spiritual consolation that ensues thereon, how would I despise the world and all the temptations of Satan, and rejoice in the Lord in every condition!" And this apprehension of grace also exceedingly prepares and fits the soul for a receiving of a blessed sense of it, so as that God may have glory thereby.

[3.] It fits the soul, *by giving a right understanding of it,* of its nature, its causes, and effects. At the first the soul goes no farther but to look after impunity, or freedom from punishment, any way. "What shall I do to be saved?" is the utmost it aims at. "Who shall deliver me? how shall I escape?" And it would be contented to escape any way,—by the law, or the gospel, all is one, so it may escape. But upon this discovery of forgiveness treated of, which is made by faith of adherence unto God, a man plainly sees the nature of it, and that it is so excellent that it is to be desired for its own sake. Indeed, when a soul is brought under trouble for sin, it knows not well what it would have. It hath an uneasiness or disquietment that it would be freed from,—a dread of some evil condition that it would avoid. But now the soul can tell what it desires, what it aims at, as well as what it would be freed from. It would have an interest in eternal love; have the gracious kindness of the heart of God turned towards itself,—a sense of the everlasting purpose of his will shed abroad in his heart; have an especial interest in the precious blood of the Son of God, whereby atonement is made for him; and that all these things be testified unto his conscience in a word of promise mixed with faith. These things he came for; this way alone he

Digitized by Google

would be saved, and no other. It sees such a glory of wisdom, love, and grace in forgiveness, such an exaltation of the love of Christ in all his offices, in all his undertaking, especially in his death, sacrifice, and blood-shedding, whereby he procured or made reconciliation for us, that it exceedingly longs after the participation of them.

All these things, in their several degrees, will this discovery of forgiveness in God, without an evidence of an especial interest therein, produce. And these will assuredly maintain the spiritual life of the soul, and keep it up unto such an obedience as shall be accepted of God in Christ. Darkness, sorrow, storms, they in whom it is may meet withal; but their eternal condition is secured in the covenant of God,—their souls are bound up in the bundle of life.

From what hath been spoken, we may make some inferences in our passage concerning the true notion of believing; for,—

1. These effects ascribed to this faith of forgiveness in God, and always produced by it, make it evident that the most of them who pretend unto it, *who pretend to believe that there is forgiveness with God, do indeed believe no such thing.* Although I shall, on set purpose, afterward evince this, yet I cannot here utterly pass it by. I shall, then, only demand of them who are so forward in the profession of this faith that they think it almost impossible that any one should not believe it, what effects it hath produced in them, and whether they have been by it enabled to the performance of the duties before mentioned? I fear with many, things on the account of their pretended faith are quite otherwise. They love sin the more for it, and God never the better. Supposing that a few barren words will issue the controversy about their sins, they become insensibly to have slight thoughts of sin and of God also. This persuasion is not of him that calls us. Poor souls, your faith is the devil's greatest engine for your ruin,—the highest contempt of God, and Christ, and forgiveness also, that you can be guilty of,—a means to let you down quietly into hell,—the Pharisees' Moses, trusted in, and [yet] will condemn you. As none is saved but by faith, so you, if it were not for your faith (as you call it), might possibly be saved. If a man's gold prove counterfeit, his jewels painted glass, his silver lead or dross, he will not only be found poor when he comes to be tried, and want the benefit of riches, but have withal a fearful aggravation of his poverty by his disappointment and surprisal. If a man's faith, which should be more precious than gold, be found rotten and corrupt, if his light be darkness, how vile is that faith, how great is that darkness! Such, it is evident, will the faith of too many be found in this business.

2. The work we are carrying on is the *raising of a sin-entangled soul out of its depths;* and this we have spoken unto is that which

Digitized by Google

must give him his first relief. Commonly, when souls are in distress, that which they look after is consolation. What is it that they intend thereby? That they may have assurance that their sins are forgiven them, and so be freed from their present perplexities. What is the issue? Some of them continue complaining all their days, and never come to rest or peace, so far do they fall short of consolation and joy; and some are utterly discouraged from attempting any progress in the ways of God. What is the reason hereof? Is it not that they would fain be finishing their building, when they have not laid the foundation? They have not yet made thorough work in believing forgiveness with God, and they would immediately be at assurance in themselves. Now, God delights not in such a frame of spirit; for,—

(1.) It is *selfish*. The great design of faith is to "give glory to God," Rom. iv. 20. The end of God's giving out forgiveness is the "praise of his glorious grace," Eph. i. 6. But let a soul in this frame have peace in itself, it is very little solicitous about giving glory unto God. He cries like Rachel, "Give me children, or I die;"—"Give me peace, or I perish." That God may be honoured, and the forgiveness he seeks after be rendered glorious, it is cared for in the second place, if at all. This selfish earnestness, at first to be thrusting our hand in the side of Christ, is that which he will pardon in many, but accepts in none.

(2.) It is *impatient*. Men do thus deport themselves because they will not wait. They do not care for standing afar off for any season with the publican. They love not to submit their souls to lie at the foot of God, to give him the glory of his goodness, mercy, wisdom, and love, in the disposal of them and their concernments. This waiting compriseth the universal subjection of the soul unto God, with a resolved judgment that it is meet and right that we, and all we desire and aim at, should be at his sovereign disposal. This gives glory to God,—a duty which the impatience of these poor souls will not admit them to the performance of. And both these arise,—

(3.) From *weakness*. It is *weak*. It is weakness in any condition, that makes men restless and weary. The state of *adherence* is as safe a condition as the state of *assurance;* only, it hath more combats and wrestling attending it. It is not, then, fear of the event, but weakness and weariness of the combat, that makes men anxiously solicitous about a deliverance from that state before they are well entered into it.

Let, then, the sin-entangled soul remember always this way, method, and order of the gospel, that we have under consideration. First, exercise faith on forgiveness in God; and when the soul is fixed

Digitized by Google

therein, it will have a ground and foundation whereon it may stand securely in making application of it unto itself. Drive this principle, in the first place, unto a stable issue upon gospel evidences, answer the objections that lie against it, and then you may proceed. In believing, the soul makes a conquest upon Satan's territories. Do, then, as they do who are entering on an enemy's country,—secure the passages, fortify the strongholds as you go on, that you be not cut off in your progress. Be not as a ship at sea, which passeth on, and is no more possessed or master of the water it hath gone through than of that whereunto it is not yet arrived. But so it is with a soul that fixeth not on these foundation principles: he presseth forwards, and the ground crumbles away under his feet, and so he wilders away all his days in uncertainties. Would men but lay this principle well in their souls, and secure it against assaults, they might proceed, though not with so much speed as some do, yet with more safety. Some pretend at once to fall into full assurance; I wish it prove not a broad presumption in the most. It is to no purpose for him to strive to fly who cannot yet go,—to labour to come to assurance in himself who never well believed forgiveness in God.

THIRDLY.[1] Now, that we may be enabled to fix this persuasion against all opposition, that which in the next place I shall do is, to give out such unquestionable evidences of this gospel truth as the soul may safely build and rest upon; and these contain the confirmation of the principal proposition before laid down.

Evidences of forgiveness in God—No inbred notions of any free acts of God's will—Forgiveness not revealed by the works of nature nor the law.

First, THE things that are spoken or to be known of God are of two sorts:—

1. *Natural and necessary;* such as are his essential properties, or the attributes of his nature, his goodness, holiness, righteousness, omnipotency, eternity, and the like. These are called, Τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, Rom. i. 19,—"That which may be known of God." And there are two ways, as the apostle there declares, whereby that which he there intimates of God may be known,—(1.) *By the inbred light of nature:* Φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς, verse 19,—"It is manifest in themselves," in their own hearts; they are taught it by the common conceptions and presumptions which they have of God by the light of nature. From hence do all mankind know concerning

[1] See note on page 412.

Digitized by Google

God that he is, that he is eternal, infinitely powerful, good, righteous, holy, omnipotent. There needs no special revelation of these things, that men may know them. That, indeed, they may be known savingly, there is; and, therefore, they that know these things by nature do also believe them on revelation: Heb. xi. 6, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder." Though men know God by the light of nature, yet they cannot come to God by that knowledge. (2.) These essential properties of the nature of God are revealed by *his works*. So the apostle in the same place, Rom. i. 20, "The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead." See also Ps. xix. 1–3. And this is the first sort of things that may be known of God.

2. There are the *free acts of his will and power*, or his free, eternal purposes, with the temporal dispensations that flow from them. Now, of this sort is the forgiveness that we are inquiring after. It is not a property of the nature of God, but an act of his will and a work of his grace. Although it hath its rise and spring in the infinite goodness of his nature, yet it proceeds from him, and is not exercised but by an absolute, free, and sovereign act of his will. Now, there is nothing of God or with him of this sort that can be any ways known but only by especial revelation; for,—

(1.) There is *no inbred notion* of the acts of God's will in the heart of man; which is the first way whereby we come to the knowledge of any thing of God. Forgiveness is not revealed by the light of nature. Flesh and blood, which nature is, declares it not; by that means "no man hath seen God at any time," John i. 18,—that is, as a God of mercy and pardon, as the Son reveals him. Adam had an intimate acquaintance, according to the limited capacity of a creature, with the properties and excellencies of the nature of God. It was implanted in his heart, as indispensably necessary unto that natural worship which, by the law of his creation, he was to perform. But when he had sinned, it is evident that he had not the least apprehension that there was forgiveness with God. Such a thought would have laid a foundation of some farther treaty with God about his condition. But he had no other design but of flying and hiding himself, Gen. iii. 10; so declaring that he was utterly ignorant of any such thing as pardoning mercy. Such, and no other, are all the first or purely natural conceptions of sinners,—namely, that it is δικαίωμα τοῦ θεοῦ, "the judgment of God," Rom. i. 32, that sin is to be punished with death. It is true, these conceptions in many are stifled by rumours, reports, traditions, that it may be otherwise; but all these are far enough from that revelation of forgiveness which we are inquiring after.

Digitized by Google

(2.) The consideration of the *works of God's creation* will not help a man to this knowledge, that there is forgiveness with God. The apostle tells us, Rom. i. 20, what it is of God that his works reveal, "even his eternal power and Godhead," or the essential properties of his nature, but no more; not any of the purposes of his grace, not any of the free acts of his will, not pardon and forgiveness. Besides, God made all things in such an estate and condition,—namely, of rectitude, integrity, and uprightness, Eccles. vii. 29,—that it was impossible they should have any respect unto sin, which is the corruption of all, or to the pardon of it, which is their restitution, whereof they stood in no need. There being no such thing in the world as a sin, nor any such thing supposed to be, when all things were made of nothing, how could any thing declare or reveal the forgiveness of it?

(3.) *No works of God's providence* can make this discovery. God hath, indeed, borne testimony to himself and his goodness in all ages, from the foundation of the world, in the works of his providence: so Acts xiv. 15–17, "We preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Οὐκ ἀμάρτυρον ἑαυτὸν ἀφῆκε,—"He left not himself without witness;" that is, by the works of his providence, there recounted, he thus far bare testimony to himself, that he is, and is good, and doth good, and ruleth the world; so that they were utterly inexcusable, who, taking no notice of these works of his, nor the fruits of his goodness, which they lived upon, turned away after τὰ μάταια, "vain things," as the apostle there calls the idols of the Gentiles. But yet these things did not discover pardon and forgiveness; for still God suffered them to go on in their own ways, and winked at their ignorance. So again, Acts xvii. 23–27, "Whom ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth" (where, by the way, there is an allusion to that of Gen. xi. 8, "The LORD scattered them abroad upon the face of all the earth"), "and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us." By arguments taken from the works of God, both of creation and provi-

Digitized by Google

dence, the apostle proves the being and the properties of God; yea, he lets them know with whom he had to do, that God designed by his works so far to reveal himself unto them as the true and living God, the maker and governor of all things, as that they ought to have inquired more diligently after him, and not to look on him alone as the "unknown God" who alone might be known, all their idols being vain and nothing. But of the discovery of pardon and forgiveness in God by these ways and means he speaks not; yea, he plainly shows that this was not done thereby: for the great call to saving repentance is by the revelation of forgiveness. But now, by these works of his providence, God called not the Gentiles to saving repentance. No; saith he, "He suffered them to walk still in their own ways," Acts xiv. 16, "and winked at the times of their ignorance; but now,"—that is, by the word of the gospel,—"commandeth them to repent," chap. xvii. 30.

Secondly, Whereas there had been *one signal act of God's providence about sin*, when man first fell into the snares of it, it was so far from the revealing forgiveness in God, that it rather severely intimated the contrary. This was God's dealing with sinning angels. The angels were the first sinners, and God dealt first with them about sin. And what was his dealing with them the Holy Ghost tell us, 2 Pet. ii. 4, Ἀγγέλων ἁμαρτησάντων οὐκ ἐφείσατο·—"He spared not the sinning angels." "He spared them not;" it is the same word which he useth where he speaks of laying all our iniquities on Christ, he undergoing the punishment due unto them: Rom. viii. 32, Οὐκ ἐφείσατο, —"He spared him not;" that is, he laid on him the full punishment that by the curse and sanction of the law was due unto sin. So he dealt with the angels that sinned: "He spared them not," but inflicted on them the punishment due unto sin, shutting them up under chains of darkness for the judgment of the great day. Hitherto, then, God keeps all thoughts of forgiveness in his own eternal bosom; there is not so much as the least dawning of it upon the world. And this was at first no small prejudice against any thoughts of forgiveness. The world is made; sin enters by the most glorious part of the creation, whose recovery by pardon might seem to be more desirable, but not the least appearance of it is discovered. Thus it was "from the beginning of the world hid in God," Eph. iii. 9.

Thirdly, God *gave* unto man *a law of obedience immediately upon his creation;* yea, for the main of it, he implanted it in him by and in his creation. This law it was supposed that man might transgress. The very nature of a law prescribed unto free agents, attended with threatenings and promises of reward, requires that supposition. Now, there was not annexed unto this law, or revealed with it, the

Digitized by Google

least intimation of pardon to be obtained if transgression should ensue. Gen. ii. 17, we have this law, "In the day thou eatest thou shalt surely die;"—"Dying thou shalt die;" or "bring upon thyself assuredly the guilt of death temporal and eternal." There God leaves the sinner, under the power of that commination. Of forgiveness or pardoning mercy there is not the least intimation. To this very day that law, which was then the whole rule of life and acceptance with God, knows no such thing. "Dying thou shalt die, O sinner," is the precise and final voice of it.

From these previous considerations, added to what was formerly spoken, some things preparatory to the ensuing discourse may be inferred; as,—

1. That it *is a great and rare thing to have forgiveness in God discovered unto a sinful soul.* A thing it is that, as hath been showed, conscience and law, with the inbred notions that are in the heart of man about God's holiness and vindictive justice, do lie against; a matter whereof we have no natural presumption, whereof there is no common notion in the mind of man; a thing which no consideration of the works of God, either of creation or providence, will reveal, and which the great instance of God's dealing with sinning angels renders deep, admirable, and mysterious. Men who have common and slight thoughts of God, of themselves, of sin, of obedience, of the judgment to come, of eternity,—that feed upon the ashes of rumours, reports, hear-says, traditions, without looking into the reality of things,—may and do take this to be an ordinary and acknowledged truth, easy to be entertained, which upon the matter no man disbelieves. But convinced sinners, who make a trial of these things as running into eternity, have other thoughts of them. And as to that which, it is pretended, every one believes, we have great cause to cry out, "Lord, who hath believed our report? to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

2. That the discovery of forgiveness in God, being a matter of so great difficulty, *is a thing precious and excellent, as being the foundation of all our communion with God here, and of all undeceiving expectation of our enjoyment of him hereafter.* It is a pure gospel truth, that hath neither shadow, footstep, nor intimation elsewhere. The whole creation hath not the least obscure impression of it left thereon. So that,—

3. It is *undoubtedly greatly incumbent on us to inquire diligently, as the prophets did of old, into this salvation; to consider what sure evidences faith hath of it, such as will not, as cannot fail us.* To be slight and common in this matter, to take it up at random, is an argument of an unsound, rotten heart. He that is not serious in his inquiry into the revelation of this matter, is serious in nothing

Digitized by Google

wherein God or his soul is concerned. The Holy Ghost knows what our frame of heart is, and how slow we are to receive this blessed truth in a gracious, saving manner. Therefore doth he confirm it unto us with such weighty considerations as, Heb. vi. 17, 18, "God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation." It is of forgiveness of sin that the apostle treats; as hath been made evident by the description of it before given. Now, to give evidence hereunto, and to beget a belief of it in us, he first engages a property of God's nature in that business. He with whom we deal is ἀψευδής· as Tit. i. 2, the God that cannot lie, that cannot deceive or be deceived: it is impossible it should be so with him. Now, as this extends itself in general to all the words and works of God, so there is peculiarly in this, whereof he treats, τὸ ἀμετάθετον τῆς βουλῆς,—an especial "immutability of his counsel." [Heb. vi. 17.] Men may think that although there be words spoken about forgiveness, yet it is possible it may be otherwise. "No," saith the apostle; "it is spoken by God, and it is impossible he should lie." Yea, but upon the manifold provocations of sinners, he may change his mind and thoughts therein. "No," saith the apostle; "there is a peculiar immutability in his counsel concerning the execution of this thing: there can be no change in it." But how doth this appear, that indeed this is the counsel of his will? "Why," saith he, "he hath declared it by his word, and that given in a way of promise: which, as in its own nature it is suited to raise an expectation in him or them to whom it is made or given, so it requires exact faithfulness in the discharge and performance of it which God on his part will assuredly answer. But neither is this all; but that no place might be left for any cavilling objection in this matter, ἐμεσίτευσεν ὅρκῳ, 'he interposed himself by an oath.'" Thus we have this truth *deduced* from the *veracity* of God's nature, one of his essential excellencies; *established* in the *immutable purpose* of his will; *brought forth* by a word of *promise;* and *confirmed* by God's interposing himself against all occasions of exception (so to put an end unto all strife about it) by an *oath*, swearing by himself that so it should be. I have mentioned this only to show what weight the Holy Ghost lays upon the delivery of this great truth, and thence how deeply it concerns us to inquire diligently into it and after the grounds and evidences which may be tendered of it; which, among others, are these that follow:—

Digitized by Google

Discovery of forgiveness in the first promise—The evidence of the truth that lies therein—And by the institution of sacrifices—Their use and end—Also by the prescription of repentance unto sinners.

I. THE first discovery of forgiveness in God (and which I place as the first evidence of it) was made in his dealing with our first parents after their shameful sin and fall. Now, to make it appear that this is an evidence that carries along with it a great conviction, and is such as faith may securely rest upon and close withal, the ensuing observations are to be considered:—

1. The *first sin in the world was, on many accounts, the greatest sin that ever was in the world.* It was the sin, as it were, of human nature, wherein there was a conspiracy of all individuals: "Omnes eramus unus ille homo;"—"In that one man, or that one sin, 'we all sinned,'" Rom. v. 12. It left not God one subject, as to moral obedience, on the earth, nor the least ground for any such to be unto eternity. When the angels sinned, the whole race or kind did not prevaricate. "Thousand thousands" of them, and "ten thousand times ten thousand," continued in their obedience, Dan. vii. 10. But here all and every individual of mankind (He only excepted which was not then in Adam) were embarked in the same crime and guilt. Besides, it disturbed the government of God in and over the whole creation. God had made all things, in number, weight, and measure, in order and beauty; pronouncing himself concerning his whole work that it was טוֹב מְאֹד, "exceeding beautiful and good," Gen. i. 31. Much of this beauty lay in the subordination of one thing to another, and of all to himself by the mediation and interposition of man, through whose praises and obedience the rest of the creation, being made subject unto him, was to return their tribute of honour and glory unto God. But all this order was destroyed by this sin, and the very "creation made subject to vanity," Rom. viii. 20; on which and the like accounts, it might be easily made to appear that it was the greatest sin that ever was in the world.

2. *Man, who had sinned, subscribed in his heart and conscience unto the righteous sentence of the law.* He knew what he had deserved, and looked for nothing but the immediate execution of the sentence of death upon him. Hence he meditates not a defence, expects no pardon, stays not for a trial, but flies and hides, and attempts an escape: Gen. iii. 10, "I was afraid," saith he, "and hid myself;" than which never were there words of greater horror in the world, nor shall be until the day of judgment. Poor creature! he was full of expectation of the vengeance due for a broken covenant.

3. *God had newly declared in the sinning angels what his justice*

Digitized by Google

required, and how he could deal with sinning man, without the least impeachment of his government, holiness, or goodness. See 2 Pet. ii. 4.

4. *There was nothing without God himself that should move him in the least, so much as to suspend the execution of his wrath for one moment.* He had not done so with the angels. All things lay now under wrath, curse, confusion, and disorder; nothing was left good, lovely, or desirable in his eye. As in the first creation, that which was first brought forth from nothing was תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ, "without form, and void," empty of all order and beauty,—nothing was in it to induce or move God to bring forth all things in the glory that ensued, but the whole design of it proceeded from his own infinite goodness and wisdom,—so was it now again. There was an emptiness and vanity brought by sin upon the whole creation. Nothing remained that might be a motive unto a merciful restoration, but all is again devolved on his sovereignty. All things being in this state and condition, wherein all doors stood open to the glory of God's justice in the punishing of sin, nothing remaining without him to hold his hand in the least, the whole creation, and especially the sinner himself, lying trembling in expectation of a dreadful doom, what now cometh forth from him? The blessed word which we have, Gen. iii. 15, "The seed of the woman shall break the serpent's head." It is full well known that the whole mystery of forgiveness is wrapped up in this one word of promise. And the great way of its coming forth from God, by the blood of the Messiah, whose heel was to be bruised, is also intimated. And this was the first discovery that ever was made of forgiveness in God. By a word of pure revelation it was made, and so faith must take it up and receive it. Now, this revelation of forgiveness with God in this one promise was the bottom of all that worship that was yielded unto him by sinners for many ages; for we have showed before, that without this no sinner can have the least encouragement to approach unto him. And this will continue to the end of the world as a notable evidence of the truth in hand, a firm foundation for faith to rest and build upon. Let a sinner seriously consider the state of things as they were then in the world, laid down before, and then view God coming forth with a word of pardon and forgiveness, merely from his own love and those counsels of peace that were between the Father and the Son, and he cannot but conclude, under his greatest difficulties, that yet "there is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared." Let now the law and conscience, let sin and Satan, stand forth and except against his evidence. Enough may be spoken from it, whatever the particular case be about which the soul hath a contest with them, to put them all to silence.

Digitized by Google

II. *God revealed this sacred truth by his institution of sacrifices.* Sacrifices by blood do all of them respect atonement, expiation, and consequently forgiveness. It is true, indeed, they could not themselves take away sin, nor make them perfect who came unto God by them, Heb. x. 1; but yet they undeniably evince the taking away of sin, or the forgiveness of it, by what they did denote and typify. I shall, therefore, look back into their rise and intendment:—

1. The *original* and first spring of sacrifices is not in the Scripture expressly mentioned, only the practice of the saints is recorded. But it is certain, from infallible Scripture evidences, that they were of God's immediate institution and appointment. God never allowed that the will or wisdom of man should be the spring and rule of his worship. That solemn word wherewith he fronts the command that is the rule of his worship, לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ,—"Thou shalt not make to thyself," which is the life of the command (that which follows being an explanation and confirmation of the law itself by instances), cuts off all such pretences, and is as a flaming sword, turning every way to prevent men's arbitrary approaches to God's institutions. God will not part with his glory of being the only lawgiver, as to the whole concernment of his worship, or any part of it, unto any of the sons of men.

2. Neither is the *time of their institution* mentioned. Some of the Papists dispute (as there are a generation of philosophical disputers amongst them, by whom their tottering cause is supported) that there should have been sacrifices in paradise, if a man had not sinned. But as, in all their opinions, our first inquiry ought to be, What do they get by this or that? their whole religion being pointed unto their carnal interest, so we may in particular do it upon this uncouth assertion, which is perfectly contradictious to the very nature and end of most sacrifices,—namely, that they should be offered where there is no sin. Why, they hope to establish hence a general rule, that there can be no true worship of God, in any state or condition, without a sacrifice. What, then, I pray? Why, then it is evident that the continual sacrifice of the mass is necessary in the church, and that without it there is no true worship of God; and so they are quickly come home to their advantage and profit,—the mass being that inexhaustible spring of revenue which feeds their pride and lust throughout the world. But there is in the church of Christ an *altar still*, and a *sacrifice still*, which they have rejected for the abominable figment of their mass,—namely, *Christ himself*, as the apostle informs us, Heb. xiii. 10. But as the sacrifices of beasts could not have been before the entrance of sin, so it may be evidenced that they were instituted from the foundation of the world,—that is,

Digitized by Google

presently after the entrance of sin. Christ is called "The Lamb of God," John i. 29, which he was in reference unto the sacrifices of old, as 1 Pet. i. 18, 19; whence he is represented in the church as a "Lamb slain," Rev. v. 6, or giving out the efficacy of all sacrifices to his church. Now, he is said to be a "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," Rev. xiii. 8, which could not be unless some sacrifice, prefiguring his being slain, had been then offered; for it denotes not only the efficacy of his mediation, but the way. Besides, the apostle tells us that "without shedding of blood there was no remission," Heb. ix. 22,—that is, God, to demonstrate that all pardon and forgiveness related to the blood of Christ from the foundation of the world, gave out no word of pardon but by and with blood. Now, I have showed before that he revealed pardon in the first promise; and therefore there ensued thereon the shedding of blood and sacrifices; and thereby that testament or covenant "was dedicated with blood" also, verse 18. Some think that the beasts, of whose skins God made garments for Adam, were offered in sacrifices. Nor is the conjecture vain; yea, it seems not to want a shadow of a gospel mystery, that their nakedness, which became their shame upon their sin (whence the pollution and shame of sin is frequently so termed), should be covered with the skins of their sacrifices: for in the true sacrifice there is somewhat answerable thereunto; and the righteousness of Him whose sacrifice takes away the guilt of our sin is called our *clothing*, that hides our pollution and shame.

3. That after the giving of the law, the greatest, most noble, and solemn part of the worship of God consisted in *sacrifices*. And this kind of worship continued, with the approbation of God, in the world about four thousand years; that is, from the entrance of sin until the death of the Messiah, the true sacrifice, which put an end unto all that was typical.

These things being premised, we may consider what was the mind and aim of God in the institution of this worship. One instance, and that of the most solemn of the whole kind, will resolve us in this inquiry. Lev. xvi. 5, "Two kids of the goats" are taken for "an offering for sin." Consider only (that we do not enlarge on particulars) how one of them was dealt withal: Verses 20–22, "He shall bring the live goat: and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited."

Let us see to what end is all this solemnity, and what is declared thereby. Wherefore should God appoint poor sinful men to come

Digitized by Google

together, to take a goat or a lamb, and to confess over his head all their sins and transgressions, and to devote him to destruction under that confession? Had men invented this themselves, it had been a matter of no moment; but it was an institution of God, which he bound his church to the observation of upon the penalty of his highest displeasure. Certainly this was a solemn declaration that there is forgiveness with him. Would that God who is infinitely good, and so will not, who is infinitely true, holy, and faithful, and so cannot deceive, call men out, whom he loved, to a solemn representation of a thing wherein their chiefest, their eternal concernment doth lie, and suffer them to feed upon ashes? Let men take heed that they mock not God; for of a truth God mocketh not man until he be finally rejected by him. For four thousand years together, then, did God declare by sacrifices that there is forgiveness with him, and led his people by them to make a public representation of it in the face of the world. This is a second uncontrollable evidence of the truth asserted, which may possibly be of use to souls that come indeed deeply and seriously to deal with God; for though the practice be ceased, yet the instruction intended in them continues.

III. *God's appointment of repentance unto sinners doth reveal that there is forgiveness in himself.* I say, the prescription of repentance is a revelation of forgiveness. After the angels had sinned, God never once called them to repentance. He would not deceive them, but let them know what they were to look for at his hands; he hath no forgiveness for them, and therefore would require no repentance of them. It is not, nor ever was, a duty incumbent on them to repent. Nor is it so unto the damned in hell. God requires it not of them, nor is it their duty. There being no forgiveness for them, what should move them to repent? Why should it be their duty so to do? Their eternal anguish about sin committed hath nothing of repentance in it. Assignation then, of repentance is a revelation of forgiveness. God would not call upon a sinful creature to humble itself and bewail its sin if there were no way of recovery or relief; and the only way of recovery from the guilt of sin is pardon. So Job xxxiii. 27, 28, "He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light." In the foregoing verses he declares the various ways that God used to bring men unto repentance. He did it by dreams, verses 15, 16; by afflictions, verse 19; by the preaching of the word, verse 23. What, then, doth God aim at in and by all these various ways of teaching? It is to cause man to say, "I have sinned, and perverted that which was right." It is to bring him to repentance. What now if he obtain his end, and cometh to that

Digitized by Google

which is aimed at? Why, then, there is forgiveness for him, as is declared, verse 28.

To improve this evidence, I shall confirm, by some few obvious considerations, these two things:—1. That *the prescription of repentance doth indeed evince that there is forgiveness with God.* 2. *That every one in whom there is repentance wrought towards God, may certainly conclude that there is forgiveness with God for him.*

1. *No repentance is acceptable with God but what is built or leans on the faith of forgiveness.* We have a cloud of witnesses unto this truth in the Scripture. Many there have been, many are recorded who have been convinced of sin, perplexed about it, sorry for it, that have made open confession and acknowledgment of it, that, under the pressing sense of it, have cried out even to God for deliverance, and yet have come short of mercy, pardon, and acceptance with God. The cases of Cain, Pharaoh, Saul, Ahab, Judas, and others, might be insisted on. What was wanting, that made all that they did abominable? Consider one instance for all. It is said of Judas that he repented: Matt. xxvii. 3, Μεταμεληθείς, "He repented himself." But wherein did this repentance consist? (1.) He was convinced of his sin in general: Ἥμαρτον, saith he,—"I have sinned," verse 4. (2.) He was sensible of the particular sin whereof he stood charged in conscience before God. "I have," saith he, "betrayed innocent blood;"—"I am guilty of blood, innocent blood, and that in the vilest manner, by treachery." So that he comes,—(3.) To a full and open confession of his sin. (4.) He makes restitution of what he was advantaged by his sin, "He brought again the thirty pieces of silver," verse 3;—all testifying a hearty sorrow that spirited the whole. Methinks now Judas' repentance looks like the young man's obedience, who cried out, "All these things have I done; is there any thing yet lacking?" Yea, one thing was wanting to that young man,—he had no true faith nor love to God all this while; which vitiated and spoiled all the rest of his performances. One thing also is wanting to this repentance of Judas,—he had no faith of forgiveness in God; that he could not believe; and, therefore, after all this sorrow, instead of coming to him, he bids him the utmost defiance, and goes away and hangs himself.

Indeed, faith of forgiveness, as hath been showed, hath many degrees. There is of them that which is indispensably necessary to render repentance acceptable. What it is in particular I do not dispute. It is not an assurance of the acceptance of our persons in general. It is not that the particular sin wherewith, it may be, the soul is perplexed, is forgiven. A general, so it be a gospel discovery that there is forgiveness in God, will suffice. The church expresseth

Digitized by Google

it, Hos. xiv. 3, "In thee the fatherless findeth mercy;" and Joel ii. 14, "Who knoweth but he will return and repent?" "I have this ground," saith the soul, "God is in himself gracious and merciful; the fatherless, the destitute and helpless, that come to him by Christ, find mercy in him. None in heaven and earth can evince but that he may return to me also." Now, let a man's convictions be never so great, sharp, wounding; his sorrow never so abundant, overflowing, abiding; his confession never so full, free, or open,—if this one thing be wanting, all is nothing but what tends to death.

2. *To prescribe repentance as a duty unto sinners, without a foundation of pardon and forgiveness in himself, is inconsistent with the wisdom, holiness, goodness, faithfulness, and all other glorious excellencies and perfections of the nature of God;* for,—

(1.) The apostle lays this as the great foundation of all consolation, that God cannot lie or deceive, Heb. vi. 18. And again, he engageth the faithfulness and veracity of God to the same purpose: Tit. i. 2, "God, who cannot lie, hath promised it." Now, there is a lie, a deceit, in things as well as in words. He that doth a thing which in its own nature is apt to deceive them that consider it, with an intention of deceiving them, is no less a liar than he which affirms that to be true which he knows to be false. There is a lie in actions as well as in words. The whole life of a hypocrite is a lie; so saith the prophet of idolaters, there is "a lie in their right hand," Isa. xliv. 20.

(2.) The proposal of repentance is a thing fitted and suited in its own nature to beget thoughts in the mind of a sinner that there is forgiveness with God. Repenting is for sinners only. "I come not," saith our Saviour, "to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." It is for them, and them only. It was no duty for Adam in Eden, it is none for the angels in heaven, nor for the damned in hell. What, then, may be the language of this appointment? "O sinners, come and deal with God by repentance." Doth it not openly speak forgiveness in God? and, if it were otherwise, could men possibly be more frustrated or deceived? would not the institution of repentance be a lie? Such a delusion may proceed from Satan, but not from Him who is the fountain of goodness, holiness, and truth. His call to repentance is a full demonstration of his readiness to forgive, Acts xvii. 30, 31. It is true, many do thus deceive themselves: they raise themselves unto an expectation of immunity, not on gospel grounds; and their disappointment is a great part of their punishment. But God deceives none; whoever comes to him on his proposal of repentance shall find forgiveness. It is said of some, indeed, that "he will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh," Prov. i. 26. He will aggravate their misery, by giving them

Digitized by Google

to see what their pride and folly hath brought them unto. But who are they? Only such as refuse his call to repentance, with the promises of the acceptation annexed.

(3.) There is, then, no cause why those who are under a call to repentance should question whether there be forgiveness in God or no. This concerns my second proposition. "Come," saith the Lord unto the souls of men, "leave your sinful ways, turn unto me; humble yourselves with broken and contrite heart." "Alas!" say poor convinced sinners, "we are poor, dark, and ignorant creatures; or we are old in sin, or greater sinners or backsliders, or have fallen often into the same sins;—can we expect there should be forgiveness for us?" Why, you are under God's invitation to repentance; and to disbelieve forgiveness is to call the truth, holiness, and faithfulness of God into question. If you will not believe forgiveness, pretend what you please, it is in truth because you hate repentance. You do but deceive your souls, when you pretend you come not up to repentance because you cannot believe forgiveness; for in the very institution of this duty God engageth all his properties to make it good that he hath pardon and mercy for sinners.

(4.) Much less cause is there to doubt of forgiveness where sincere repentance is in any measure wrought. No soul comes to repentance but upon God's call; God calls none but whom he hath mercy for upon their coming. And as for those who sin against the Holy Ghost, as they shut themselves out from forgiveness, so they are not called to repentance.

(5.) God expressly declares in the Scripture that the forgiveness that is with him is the foundation of his prescribing repentance unto man. One instance may suffice: Isa. lv. 7, "Let the wicked forsake his way" (רָשָׁע, "a perverse wicked one," וְאִישׁ אָוֶן), "and the man of iniquity his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy; and to our God, for יַרְבֶּה לִסְלוֹחַ, he will multiply to pardon." You see to whom he speaks,—to men perversely wicked, and such as make a trade of sinning. What doth he call them unto? Plainly, to repentance, to the duty we have insisted on. But what is the ground of such an invitation unto such profligate sinners? Why, the abundant forgiveness and pardon that is with him, superabounding unto what the worst of them can stand in need of; as Rom. v. 20.

And this is another way whereby God hath revealed that there is forgiveness with him; and an infallible bottom for faith to build upon in its approaches unto God it is. Nor can the certainty of this evidence be called into question but on such grounds as are derogatory to the glory and honour of God. And this connection of repentance and forgiveness is that principle from whence God convinces a stubborn, unbelieving people that all his ways and dealings with sinners

Digitized by Google

are just and equal, Ezek. xviii. 25. And should there be any failure in it, they could not be so. Every soul, then, that is under a call to repentance, whether out of his natural condition or from any backsliding into folly after conversion, hath a sufficient foundation to rest on as to the pardon he inquires after. God is ready to deal with him on terms of mercy. If, out of love to sin or the power of unbelief, he refuse to close with him on these terms, his condemnation is just. And it will be well that this consideration be well imprinted on the minds of men. I say, notwithstanding the general presumptions that men seem to have of this matter, yet these principles of it ought to be inculcated; for,—

[1.] Such is the *atheism* that lies lurking in the hearts of men by nature, that, notwithstanding their pretences and professions, we have need to be pressing upon them evidences of the very being and essential properties of God. In so doing, we have the assistance of inbred notions in their own minds, which they cannot eject, to help to carry on the work. How much more is this necessary in reference unto the free acts of the will of God, which are to be known only by mere revelation! Our word had need to be "line upon line;" and yet, when we have done, we have cause enough to cry out, as was said, "Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

[2.] What was spoken before of the *obstacles* that lie in the way, hindering souls from a saving reception of this truth, ought to be remembered. Those who have no experience of them between God and their souls seem to be ignorant of the true nature of conscience, law, gospel, grace, sin, and forgiveness.

[3.] Many who are come to a *saving persuasion* of it, yet having not received it upon clear and unquestionable grounds, and so not knowing how to resolve their faith of it into its *proper principles*, are not able to answer the objections that lie against it in their own consciences, and so do miserably fluctuate about it all their days. These had need to have these principles inculcated on them. Were they pondered aright, some might have cause to say, with the Samaritans, who first gave credit to the report of the woman, John iv. they had but a report before, but now they find all things to be according unto it, yea, to exceed it. A little experience of a man's own unbelief, with the observation that may easily be made of the uncertain progresses and fluctuations of the spirits of others, will be a sufficient conviction of the necessity of the work we are engaged in.

But it will yet be said, that it is needless to multiply arguments and evidences in this case, the truth insisted on being granted as one of the fundamental principles of religion. As it is not, then, by

Digitized by Google

any called in question, so it doth not appear that so much time and pains is needful for the confirmation of it; for what is granted and plain needs little confirmation. But several things may be returned in answer hereunto; all which may at once be here pleaded for the multiplication of our arguments in this matter:—

1. *That it is generally granted by all is no argument that it is effectually believed by many.* Sundry things are taken for granted in point of opinion that are not so believed as to be improved in practice. We have in part showed before, and shall afterward undeniably evince, that there are very few that believe this truth with that faith that will interest them in it and give them the benefit of it. And what will it avail any of us that there is forgiveness of sin with God, if our sins be not forgiven? No more than that such or such a king is rich, whilst we are poor and starving. My aim is not to prove it as an opinion or a mere speculative truth, but so to evidence it in the principles of its being and revelation as that it may be believed; whereon all our blessedness depends.

2. *It needs never the less confirmation because it is a plain fundamental truth,* but rather the more; and that because both of the worth and weight of it. "This is a faithful saying," saith the apostle, "worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." So I say of this, which, for the substance of it, is the same with that. It is worthy of all acceptation, namely, that there is forgiveness with God; and therefore ought it to be fully confirmed, especially whilst we make use of no other demonstrations of it but those only which God hath furnished us withal to that purpose: and this he would not have done, but that he knew them needful for us. And for the plainness of this truth, it is well if it be so unto us. This I know, nothing but the Spirit of God can make it so. Men may please themselves and others sometimes with curious notions, and make them seem to be things of great search and attainment, which, when they are well examined, it may be they are not true; or if they are, are yet of a very little consequence or importance. It is these fundamental truths that have the mysteries of the wisdom and grace of God inwrapped in them; which whoso can unfold aright, will show himself "a workman that needs not be ashamed." These still waters are deep; and the farther we dive into them, the greater discovery shall we make of their depths. And many other sacred truths there are whose mention is common, but whose depths are little searched and whose efficacy is little known.

3. We multiply these evidences, because *they are multitudes that are concerned in them.* All that do believe, and all that do not believe, are so,—those that do believe, that they may be established; and those that do not believe, that they may be encouraged so to do.

Digitized by Google

Among both these sorts, some evidences may be more profitable and useful, one to one, some to another. It may be, amongst all, all will be gathered up, that no fragments be lost. They are all, I hope, instruments provided by the Holy Ghost for this end; and by this ordinance do we endeavour to put them into his hand, to be made effectual as he will. One may reach one soul, another another, according to his pleasure. One may be of use to establishment, another to consolation, a third to encouragement, according as the necessities of poor souls do require. However, God, who hath provided them, knows them all to be needful.

4. They are so, also, upon the account of *the various conditions* wherein the spirits of believers themselves may be. One may give help to the same soul at one season, another at another; one may secure the soul against a temptation, another stir it up to thankfulness and obedience.

These things have I spoken, that you may not think we dwell too long on this consideration. And I pray God that your consolation and establishment may abound in the reading of these meditations, as I hope they have not been altogether without their fruit in their preparation.

Farther evidences of forgiveness with God—Testimonies that God was well pleased with some that were sinners—The patience of God towards the world an evidence of forgiveness—Experience of the saints of God to the same purpose.

IV. Let us, then, in the fourth place, as a fourth evidence of this truth, *consider those, both under the Old Testament and the New, concerning whom we have the greatest assurance that God was well pleased with them, and that they are now in the enjoyment of him.* And this argument unto this purpose the apostle insists upon, and presseth from sundry instances, Heb. xi. How many doth he there reckon up who of old "obtained a good report," and "this testimony, that they pleased God!" verses 2, 5. "All these inherited the promises" through believing,—that is, obtained the "forgiveness of sins:" for whereas "by nature they were children of wrath," and "under the curse" as well as others, obtaining an infallible interest in the favour of God, and this testimony, "that they pleased him," it could no otherwise be; for without this, on a just account, every one of them would have continued in the state wherein Adam was when he "heard the voice of God, and was afraid." Wherefore, it being evident that some persons, in all generations, have enjoyed the friendship, love, and favour of God in this world, and at their de-

Digitized by Google

parture out of it have entered into glory, it makes it evident that there is forgiveness of sin with him; without which these things could not be.

Let us, after the example of the apostle, mention some particular instances in this matter. Look unto Abraham: he was the "friend of God," and walked with God. God made a solemn covenant with him, and takes it for his memorial throughout all generations that he is the "God of Abraham." And he is doubtless now at rest with God. Our Saviour calls the place or condition whereinto blessed souls are gathered, "Abraham's bosom." He is at rest with whom others are at rest.

The condition was the same with Isaac and Jacob. They also are in heaven, being alive unto and with God. Our Saviour proves it from the tenor of the covenant: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living," Matt. xxii. 32. They are yet alive, alive unto God, and with him by virtue of the covenant; or, after their death, God would not be said to be their God. This is the force of our Saviour's argument in that place, that after their death God was still their God. Then death had not reached their whole persons. They were still alive with God in heaven; and their bodies, by virtue of the same covenant, were to be recovered out of the dust.

The same is the state with David. He was a "man after God's own heart," that did his will and fulfilled all his pleasure. And although he died, and his body saw corruption, yet he is not lost; he is with God in heaven. Hence he ended his days triumphantly, in a full apprehension of eternal rest, beyond what could in this world be attained, and that by virtue of the covenant; for these are the last words of David, "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant," ascertaining unto him sure and eternal mercies, 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

Peter also is in heaven. Christ prayed for him that his faith should not fail; and in his death he glorified God, John xxi. 19. So is Paul; he also is in heaven. He knew that when he was dissolved he should be with Christ.

Here, then, "we are compassed about with a cloud of witnesses;" for,—

1. *It is most certain that they were all sinners.* They were all so by nature; for therein there is no difference between any of the children of men. And personally they were sinners also. They confessed so of themselves, and some of the sins of all of them stand upon record. Yea, some of them were great sinners, or guilty of great and signal miscarriages;—some before their conversion, as Abraham, who was an idolater, Josh. xxiv. 2, 3, and Paul, who was

Digitized by Google

a persecutor and a blasphemer; some after their conversion; some in sins of the flesh against their obedience, as David; and some in sins of profession against faith, as Peter. Nothing, then, is more evident than that no one of them came to rest with God but by forgiveness. Had they never been guilty of any one sin, but only what is left upon record concerning them in holy writ, yet they could be saved no other way; for he that transgresseth the law in any one point is guilty of the breach of the whole, James ii. 10.

What shall we now say? Do we think that God hath forgiveness only for this or that individual person? No man questions but that all these were pardoned. Was it by virtue of any especial personal privilege that was peculiar unto them? Whence should any such privilege arise, seeing by nature they were no better than others, nor would have been so personally had not they been delivered from sin, and prepared for obedience by grace, mercy, and pardon? Wherefore, they all obtained forgiveness by virtue of the covenant, from the forgiveness which is with God. And this is equally ready for others who come to God the same way that they did; that is, by faith and repentance.

2. Many of those concerning whom we have the assurance mentioned *were not only sinners but great sinners*, as was said; which must be also insisted on, to obviate another objection. For some may say, that although they were sinners, yet they were not such sinners as we are; and although they obtained forgiveness, yet this is no argument that we shall do so also, who are guilty of other sins than they were, and those attended with other aggravations than theirs were. To which I say, that I delight not in aggravating, no, nor yet in repeating, the sins and faults of the saints of God of old. Not only *the grace of God*, but *the sins of men* have by some been turned into lasciviousness, or been made a cloak for their lusts. But yet, for the ends and purposes for which they are recorded by the Holy Ghost, we may make mention of them. That they may warn us of our duty, that we take heed lest we also fall, that they may yield us a relief under our surprisals, are they written. So, then, where the mention of them tends to the advancement of sovereign grace and mercy, which is the case in hand, we may insist on them. I think, then, that, without mention of particulars, I may safely say that there is no sin, no degree of sin, no aggravating circumstance of sin, no kind of continuance in sin (the only sin excepted), but that there are those in heaven who have been guilty of them.

It may be, yet some will say that they have considered the sins and falls of Lot, David, Peter, Paul, and the thief himself on the cross, and yet they find not their own condition exemplified, so as to conclude that they shall have the same success with them.

Digitized by Google

Ans. 1. I am not showing that this or that man shall be pardoned, but only demonstrating that *there is forgiveness with God*, and that for all sorts of sins and sinners; which these instances do assuredly confirm. And, moreover, they manifest that if other men are not pardoned, it is merely because they make not that application for forgiveness which they did.

2. Yet by the way, to take off this objection also, consider what the apostle says in particular concerning *the several sorts of sinners* that obtained mercy: 1 Cor. vi. 9–11, "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified." Hell can scarce, in no more words, yield us a sadder catalogue. Yet some of all these sorts were justified and pardoned.

3. Suppose this enumeration of sins doth not reach the condition of the soul, because of some especial aggravation of its sin not expressed;—let such a one add that of our Saviour: Matt. xii. 31, "I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost." They are not, they shall not be, all actually remitted and pardoned unto all men; but they are all pardonable unto those that seek to obtain pardon for them according unto the gospel. There is with God forgiveness for them all. Now, certainly there is no sin, but only that excepted, but it comes within the compass of "All manner of sin and blasphemy;" and so, consequently, some that have been guilty of it are now in heaven.

We take it for a good token and evidence of a virtuous healing water, when, without fraud or pretence, we see the crutches of cured cripples and impotent persons hung about it as a memorial of its efficacy. And it is a great demonstration of the skill and ability of a physician, when many come to a sick person and tell him "We had the same distemper with you,—it had the same symptoms, the same effects; and by his skill and care we are cured." "Oh!" saith the sick man, "bring him unto me, I will venture my life in his hand." Now, all the saints of heaven stand about a sin-sick soul; for in this matter "we are compassed about with a cloud of witnesses," Heb. xii. 1. And what do they bear witness unto? what say they unto a poor guilty sinner? "As thou art, so were we; so guilty, so perplexed, so obnoxious to wrath, so fearing destruction from God." "And what way did you steer, what course did you take, to obtain the blessed condition wherein now you are?" Say they, "We went all to God through Christ for forgiveness; and found plenty of grace,

Digitized by Google

mercy, and pardon in him for us all." The rich man in the parable thought it would be a great means of conversion if one should "rise from the dead" and preach; but here we see that all the saints departed and now in glory do jointly preach this fundamental truth, that "there is forgiveness with God."

Poor souls are apt to think that all those whom they read or hear of to be gone to heaven, went thither because they were so good and so holy. It is true many of them were eminently and exemplarily so in their generations, all of them were so according to their degrees and measures; for "without holiness no man can see God,"—and it is our duty to labour to be like unto them in holiness, if ever we intend to be so in happiness and glory;—but yet not one of them, not any one that is now in heaven, Jesus Christ alone excepted, did ever come thither any other way but by forgiveness of sin; and that will also bring us thither, though we come short of many of them in holiness and grace.

And this evidence of forgiveness I the rather urge, because I find the apostle Paul doing of it eminently in his own person: 1 Tim. i. 12–16, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." "A great sinner," saith he, "the chiefest of sinners I was;" which he manifests by some notable instances of his sin. "I was," saith he, "a blasphemer,"—the highest sin against God; "a persecutor,"—the highest sin against the saints; "injurious,"—the highest wickedness towards mankind. "But," saith he, "I obtained mercy, I am pardoned;"—and that with a blessed effect; first, that he should after all this be so accounted faithful as to be put into the ministry; and then that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ in him and towards him was exceeding abundant. And what was the reason, what was the cause, that he was thus dealt withal? Why, it was that he might be a pattern, an evidence, an argument, that there was grace, mercy, forgiveness, to be had for all sorts of sinners that would believe to life everlasting.

To conclude, then, this evidence:—Every one who is now in heaven hath his pardon sealed in the blood of Christ. All these pardons are, as it were, hanged up in the gospel; they are all enrolled in the

Digitized by Google

promises thereof, for the encouragement of them that stand in need of forgiveness to come and sue out theirs also. Fear not, then, the guilt of sin, but the love of it and the power of it. If we love and like sin better than forgiveness, we shall assuredly go without it. If we had but rather be pardoned in God's way than perish, our condition is secure.

V. The same is evident from the patience of God towards the world, and the end of it. For the clearing hereof we may observe,—

1. That upon the first entrance of sin and breach of that covenant which God had made with mankind in Adam, he might immediately *have executed the threatened curse, and have brought eternal death upon them that sinned.* Justice required that it should be so, and there was nothing in the whole creation to interpose so much as for a reprieve or a respite of vengeance. And had God then sent sinning man, with the apostate angels that induced him into sin, immediately into eternal destruction, he would have been glorified in his righteousness and severity by and among the angels that sinned not. Or he could have created a new race of innocent creatures to have worshipped him and glorified him for his righteous judgment, even as the elect at the last day shall do for the destruction of ungodly men.

2. *God hath not taken this course.* He hath continued the race of mankind for a long season on the earth; he hath watched over them with his providence, and exercised exceeding patience, forbearance, and long-suffering towards them. Thus the apostle Paul at large discourseth on, Acts xiv. 15–17, xvii. 24–30, as also Rom. ii. 4. And it is open and manifest in their event. The whole world is every day filled with tokens of the power and patience of God; every nation, every city, every family is filled with them.

3. That there is a *common abuse of this patience* of God visible in the world in all generations. So it was of old: God saw it to be so, and complained of it, Gen. vi. 5, 6. All the evil, sin, wickedness, that hath been in the world, which no heart can conceive, no tongue can express, hath been all an abuse of this patience of God. This, with the most, is the consequent of God's patience and forbearance. Men count it a season to fulfil all the abominations that their evil hearts can suggest unto them, or Satan draw them into a combination with himself in. This the state of things in the world proclaims, and every one's experience confirms.

4. Let us, therefore, consider what is *the true and proper end of this patience of God* towards the world, enduring it in sin and wickedness for so long a season, and suffering one generation to be multiplied after another. Shall we think that God hath no other design in all this patience towards mankind, in all generations, but

Digitized by Google

merely to suffer them, all and every one, without exception, to sin against him, dishonour him, provoke him, that so he may at length everlastingly destroy them all? It is confessed that this is the consequent, the event of it with the most, through their perverse wickedness, with their love of sin and pleasure. But is this the design of God,—his only design? Hath he no other purpose but merely to forbear them a while in their folly, and then to avenge himself upon them? Is this his intendment, not only towards those who are obstinate in their darkness, ignorance, and rebellion against him, whose "damnation is just, and sleepeth not," but also towards those whom he stirs up by his grace to seek after a remedy and deliverance from the state of sin and death? God forbid; yea, such an apprehension would be contrary to all those notions of the infinite wisdom and goodness of God which are ingrafted upon our hearts by nature, and which all his works manifest and declare. Whatever, therefore, it be, this cannot be the design of God in his patience towards the world. It cannot be but that he must long since have cut off the whole race of mankind, if he had no other thoughts and purposes towards them.

5. If this patience of God hath any other intention towards any, any other effect upon some, upon any, that is to be reckoned *the principal end of it*, and for the sake whereof it is evidently extended unto some others, consequentially unto all. For those concerning whom God hath an especial design in his patience, being to be brought forth in the world after the ordinary way of mankind, and that in all ages during the continuance of the world, from the beginning unto the end thereof, the patience which is extended unto them must also of necessity reach unto all in that variety wherein God is pleased to exercise it. The whole world, therefore, is continued under the patience of God and the fruits of it, for the sake of some that are in it.

6. Let us, therefore, see what is the end of this patience, and what it teacheth us. Now, it can have no end possible but only that before rejected, unless there be forgiveness of sins with God. Unless God be ready and willing to forgive the sins of them that come to him according unto his appointment, his patience is merely subservient unto a design of wrath, anger, severity, and a *resolution to destroy*. Now, this is an abomination once to suppose, and would reflect unspeakable dishonour upon the holy God. Let a man but deal thus, and it is a token of as evil an habit of mind, and perverse, as any can befall him. Let him bear with those that are in his power in their faults, for no other end or with no other design but that he may take advantage to bring a greater punishment and revenge upon them; and what more vile affection, what more

Digitized by Google

wretched corruption of heart and mind, can he manifest? And shall we think that this is the whole design of the patience of God? God forbid.

It may be objected "That this argument is not cogent, because of the instance that lies against it in God's dealing with the angels that sinned. It is evident that they fell into their transgression and apostasy before mankind did so, for they led and seduced our first parents into sin; and yet God bears with them, and exerciseth patience towards them, to this very day, and will do so unto the consummation of all things, when they shall be cast into the fire 'prepared for the devil and his angels;' and yet it is granted that there is no forgiveness in God for them: so that it doth not necessarily follow that there is so for man, because of his patience towards them."

I answer, that this must be more fully spoken unto when we come to remove that great objection against this whole truth which was mentioned before, taken from God's dealing with the sinning angels, whom he spared not. At present two or three observations will remove it out of our way; for,—

(1.) *The case is not the same with the sinning angels and the race of mankind in all generations.* There are no other angels in this condition, but only those individuals who first sinned in their own persons. They are not, in the providence and patience of God, multiplied and increased in ensuing times and seasons, but they continue the same individual persons who first sinned, and no more; so that immediate execution of the whole punishment due unto their sin would not have prevented any increase of them. But now with man it is otherwise; for God continues his patience towards them to the production of millions of other persons, who were not actually in the first sin. Had not God so continued his forbearance, their being, and consequently their sin and misery, had been prevented; so that the case is not the same with sinning angels and men.

(2.) Indeed God *exerciseth no patience* toward the angels that sinned, and that because he had no forgiveness for them. So Peter tells us, 2 Epist. ii. 4, "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness." Immediately upon their sin they were cast out of the presence of God, whose vision and enjoyment they were made for, and which they received some experience of; and they were cast into hell, as the place of their ordinary retention and of their present anguish, under the sense of God's curse and displeasure. And although they may some of them be permitted to compass the earth, and to walk to and fro therein, to serve the ends of God's holy, wise providence, and so to be out of their prison, yet they are still in their

Digitized by Google

chains; for they were delivered unto chains of darkness, to be kept unto the last judgment. And in these things they lie actually under the execution of the curse of God, so that there is indeed no patience exercised towards them. If a notorious malefactor or murderer be committed unto a dungeon, and kept bound with iron chains to prevent his escape, until the appointed day of his solemn judgment and execution, without the least intention to spare him, none will say there is patience exercised towards him, things being disposed only so as that his punishment may be secure and severe. And such is the case, such is the condition of the angels that sinned; who are not, therefore, to be esteemed objects of God's patience.

(3.) The reason why *the full and final punishment of these angels is reserved and respited unto the appointed season* is not for their own sakes, their good, benefit, or advantage at all, but merely that the end of God's patience towards mankind might be accomplished. When this is once brought about they shall not be spared a day, an hour, a moment. So that God's dispensation towards them is nothing but a mere withholding the infliction of the utmost of their punishment, until he hath accomplished the blessed ends of his patience towards mankind.

But you will say, secondly, "Is it not said that God, 'willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endures with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?' Rom. ix. 22; so that it seems that the end of God's endurance and long-suffering, to some at least, is only their fitting unto destruction."

Ans. 1. It is one thing to endure with much long-suffering, another thing to exercise and declare patience. The former only intimates God's withholding for a season of that destruction which he might justly inflict, which we speak not of; the other denotes an acting in a way of goodness and kindness for some especial end.

2. The next verse declares the great end of God's patience, and answers this objection: "That he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory," verse 23. This is the great end of God's patience, which whilst he is in the pursuit of towards the vessels of mercy, he endureth others with much long-suffering and forbearance. This, then, is fully evident, that there could be no sufficient reason assigned of the patience of God towards sinners, but that there is forgiveness prepared for them that come to him by Christ.

And this the Scripture clearly testifies unto, 2 Pet. iii. 9. The question is, What is the reason why God forbears the execution of his judgment upon wicked and ungodly men? Some would have it that God is slack,—that is, regardless of the sins of men, and takes no notice of them. "No," saith the apostle; "God hath another

Digitized by Google

design in his patience and long-suffering." What is this? "It is to manifest that he is not willing we should perish." That is it which we have proved; for our freedom from destruction is by repentance, which necessarily infers the forgiveness of sin. So Paul tells us that in the gospel is declared what is the end of God's patience and forbearance: "It is," saith he, "the remission of sins," Rom. iii. 25.

Let us, therefore, also mind this evidence in the application of ourselves to God for pardon. It is certain that God might have taken us from the womb, and have cast us into utter darkness; and in the course of our lives we have been guilty of such provocations as God might justly have taken the advantage of to glorify his justice and severity in our ruin; but yet we have lived thus long, in the patience and forbearance of God. And to what end hath he thus spared us, and let pass those advantages for our destruction that we have put into his hand? Is it not that he might by his patience give us leave and space to get an interest in that forgiveness which he thus testifies to be in himself? Let us, then, be encouraged by it to use it unto the end and purpose for which it is exercised towards us. You that are yet in doubt of your condition, consider that the patience of God was extended unto you this day, this very day, that you might use it for the obtaining of the remission of your sins. Lose not this day, nor one day more, as you love your souls; for woful will be their condition who shall perish for despising or abusing the patience of God.

VI. *The faith and experience of the saints in this world* give in testimony unto this truth; and we know that their record in this matter is true. Let us, then, ask of them what they believe, what they have found, what they have experience of, as to the forgiveness of sin. This God himself directs and leads us unto by appealing unto our own experience, whence he shows us that we may take relief and supportment in our distresses: Isa. xl. 28, "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard?"—"Hast not thou thyself, who now criest out that thou art lost and undone because God hath forsaken thee, found and known by experience the contrary, from his former dealings with thee?" And if our own experiences may confirm us against the workings of our unbelief, so may those of others also. And this is that which Eliphaz directs Job unto, chap. v. 1, "Call now, if there be any that will answer thee; and to which of the saints wilt thou look?" It is not a supplication to them for help that is intended, but an inquiry after their experience in the case in hand, wherein he wrongfully thought they could not justify Job. וְאֶל־מִי מִקְּדֹשִׁים תִּפְנֶה, "To which of the saints, on the right hand or left, wilt thou have regard in this matter?" Some would foolishly hence seek to confirm the invocation of the saints departed; when, indeed, if

Digitized by Google

they were intended, it is rather forbidden and discountenanced than directed unto. But the קְדֹשִׁים here are the קְדוֹשִׁים אֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ, Ps. xvi. 2, "The saints that are in the earth," whose experiences Job is directed to inquire into and after. David makes it a great encouragement unto waiting upon God, as a God hearing prayer, that others had done so and found success: Ps. xxxiv. 6, "This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." If he did so, and had that blessed issue, why should not we do so also? The experiences of one are often proposed for the confirmation and establishment of others. So the same David: "Come," saith he, "and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." He contents not himself to mind them of the word, promises, and providence of God, which he doth most frequently; but he will give them the encouragement and supportment also of his own experience. So Paul tells us that he "was comforted of God in all his tribulation, that he might be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith he himself was comforted of God," 2 Cor. i. 4; that is, that he might be able to communicate unto them his own experience of God's dealing with him, and the satisfaction and assurance that he found therein. So also he proposeth the example of God's dealing with him in the pardon of his sins as a great motive unto others to believe, 1 Tim. i. 13–16. And this mutual communication of satisfying experiences in the things of God, or of our spiritual sense and evidence of the power, efficacy, and reality of gospel truths, being rightly managed, is of singular use to all sorts of believers. So the same great apostle acquaints us in his own example, Rom. i. 11, 12, "I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me." He longed not only to be instructing of them, in the pursuit of the work of the ministry committed unto him, but to confer also with them about their mutual faith, and what experiences of the peace of God in believing they had attained.

We have in our case called in the testimony of *the saints in heaven*, with whom those on earth do make up one family, even that one family in heaven and earth which is called after the name of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Eph. iii. 14, 15. And they all agree in their testimony, as becomes the family and children of God. But those below we may deal personally with; whereas we gather the witness of the other only from what is left upon record concerning them. And for the clearing of this evidence sundry things are to be observed; as,—

1. *Men living under the profession of religion, and not experi-*

Digitized by Google

encing the power, virtue, and efficacy of it in their hearts, are, whatever they profess, very near to atheism, or at least exposed to great temptations thereunto. If "they profess they know God, but in works deny him," they are "abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate," Tit. i. 16. Let such men lay aside tradition and custom, let them give up themselves to a free and a rational consideration of things, and they will quickly find that all their profession is but a miserable self-deceiving, and that, indeed, they believe not one word of the religion which they profess: for of what their religion affirms to be in themselves they find not any thing true or real; and what reason have they, then, to believe that the things which it speaks of that are without them are one jot better? If they have no experience of what it affirms to be within them, what confidence can they have of the reality of what it reveals to be without them? John tells us that "he who saith he loves God whom he hath not seen, and doth not love his brother whom he hath seen, is a liar." Men who do not things of an equal concernment unto them wherein they may be tried, are not to be believed in what they profess about greater things, whereof no trial can be had. So he that believes not, who experienceth not, the power of that which the religion he professeth affirms to be in him, if he says that he doth believe other things which he can have no experience of, he is a liar. For instance, he that professeth the gospel avows that the death of Christ doth crucify sin; that faith purifieth the heart; that the Holy Ghost quickens and enables the soul unto duty; that God is good and gracious unto all that come unto him; that there is precious communion to be obtained with him by Christ; that there is great joy in believing. These things are plainly, openly, frequently insisted on in the gospel. Hence the apostle presseth men unto obedience on the account of them; and, as it were, leaves them at liberty from it if they were not so, Phil. ii. 1, 2. Now, if men have lived long in the profession of these things, saying that they are so, but indeed find nothing of truth, reality, or power in them, have no experience of the effects of them in their own hearts or souls, what stable ground have they of believing any thing else in the gospel whereof they cannot have experience? A man professeth that the death of Christ will mortify sin and subdue corruption; why doth he believe it? Because it is so affirmed in the gospel. How, then, doth he find it to be so? hath it this effect upon his soul, in his own heart? Not at all; he finds no such thing in him. How, then, can this man believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God because it is affirmed in the gospel, seeing that he finds no real truth of that which it affirms to be in himself? So our Saviour argues, John iii. 12, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how will ye believe

Digitized by Google

if I tell you heavenly things?"—"If you believe not the doctrine of regeneration, which you ought to have experience of, as a thing that is wrought in the hearts of men on the earth, how can you assent unto those heavenly mysteries of the gospel which at first are to be received by a pure act of faith, without any present sense or experience?"

Of all dangers, therefore, in profession, let professors take heed of this,—namely, of a customary, traditional, or doctrinal owning such truths as ought to have their effects and accomplishment in themselves, whilst they have no experience of the reality and efficacy of them. This is plainly to have a form of godliness, and to deny the power thereof. And of this sort of men do we see many turning atheists, scoffers, and open apostates. They find in themselves that their profession was a lie, and that in truth they had none of those things which they talked of; and to what end should they continue longer in the avowing of that which is not? Besides, finding those things which they have professed to be in them not to be so, they think that what they have believed of the things that are without them are of no other nature; and so reject them altogether.

You will say, then, "What shall a man do who cannot find or obtain an experience in himself of what is affirmed in the word? He cannot find the death of Christ crucifying sin in him, and he cannot find the Holy Ghost sanctifying his nature, or obtain joy in believing; what shall he, then, do? shall he not believe or profess those things to be so, because he cannot obtain a blessed experience of them?" I answer, our Saviour hath perfectly given direction in this case: John vii. 17, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Continue in following after the things revealed in the doctrine of the gospel, and you shall have a satisfactory experience that they are true, and that they are of God. Cease not to act faith on them, and you shall find their effects; for "then shall we know, if we follow on to know the LORD," Hos. vi. 3. Experience will ensue upon permanency in faith and obedience; yea, the first act of sincere believing will be accompanied with such a taste, will give the soul so much experience, as to produce a firm adherence unto the things believed. And this is the way to "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God," which is revealed unto us, Rom. xii. 2.

2. *Where there is an inward, spiritual experience of the power, reality, and efficacy of any supernatural truth, it gives great satisfaction, stability, and assurance unto the soul.* It puts the soul out of danger or suspicion of being deceived, and gives it to have the testimony of God in itself. So the apostle tells us, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself," 1 John

Digitized by Google

v. 10. He had discoursed of the manifold testimony that is given in heaven by all the holy persons of the Trinity, and on earth by grace and ordinances, unto the forgiveness of sin and eternal life to be obtained by Jesus Christ. And this record is true, firm, and stable, an abiding foundation for souls to rest upon, that will never deceive them. But yet all this while it is without us,—it is that which we have no experience of in ourselves; only we rest upon it because of the authority and faithfulness of them that gave it. But now he that actually believeth, he hath the testimony in himself; he hath by experience a real evidence and assurance of the things testified unto,—namely, "That God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son," verse 11. Let us, then, a little consider wherein this evidence consisteth, and from whence this assurance ariseth. To this end some few things must be considered; as,—

(1.) *That there is a great answerableness and correspondency between the heart of a believer and the truth that he doth believe.* As the word is in the gospel, so is grace in the heart; yea, they are the same thing variously expressed: Rom. vi. 17, "Ye have obeyed from the heart;" εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε τύπον διδαχῆς, "that form of doctrine which was delivered you." As our translation doth not, so I know not how in so few words to express that which is emphatically here insinuated by the Holy Ghost. The meaning is, that the doctrine of the gospel begets the form, figure, image, or likeness of itself in the hearts of them that believe, so they are cast into the mould of it. As is the one, so is the other. The principle of grace in the heart and that in the word are as children of the same parent, completely resembling and representing one another. Grace is a living word, and the word is figured, limned grace. As is regeneration, so is a regenerate heart; as is the doctrine of faith, so is a believer. And this gives great evidence unto and assurance of the things that are believed: "As we have heard, so we have seen and found it." Such a soul can produce the duplicate of the word, and so adjust all things thereby.

(2.) That *the first original expression of divine truth is not in the word, no, not as given out from the infinite abyss of divine wisdom and veracity, but it is first hid, laid up, and expressed in the person of Christ.* He is the ἀρχέτυπος, the first pattern of truth, which from him is expressed in the word, and from and by the word impressed in the hearts of believers: so that as it hath pleased God that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge should be in him, dwell in him, have their principal residence in him, Col. ii. 3; so the whole word is but a revelation of the truth in Christ, or an expression of his image and likeness to the sons of men. Thus we are said to learn "the truth as it is in Jesus," Eph. iv. 21. It is in Jesus

Digitized by Google

originally and really; and from him it is communicated unto us by the word. We are thereby taught and do learn it, for thereby, as the apostle proceeds, "we are renewed in the spirit of our mind, and do put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness," verses 23, 24. First, the truth is in Jesus, then it is expressed in the word; this word learned and believed becomes grace in the heart, every way answering unto the Lord Christ his image, from whom this transforming truth did thus proceed. Nay, this is carried by the apostle yet higher, namely, unto God the Father himself, whose image Christ is, and believers his through the word: 2 Cor. iii. 18, "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord;" whereunto add chap. iv. 6, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The first pattern or example of all truth and holiness is God himself; hereof "Christ is the image," verse 4. Christ is the image of God, "The brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person," Heb. i. 3; "The image of the invisible God," Col. i. 15. Hence we are said to "see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;" because he being his image, the love, grace, and truth of the Father are represented and made conspicuous in him: for we are said to "behold it in his face," because of the open and illustrious manifestation of the glory of God in him. And how do we behold this glory? In a glass,—"As in a glass;" that is, in the gospel, which hath the image and likeness of Christ, who is the image of God, reflected upon it and communicated unto it. So have we traced truth and grace from the person of the Father unto the Son as a mediator, and thence transfused into the word. In the Father it is essentially; in Jesus Christ originally and exemplarily; and in the word as in a transcript or copy. But doth it abide there? No; God by the word of the gospel "shines in our hearts," 2 Cor. iv. 6. He irradiates our minds with a saving light into it and apprehension of it. And what thence ensues? The soul of a believer is "changed into the same image" by the effectual working of the Holy Ghost, chap. iii. 18; that is, the likeness of Christ implanted on the word is impressed on the soul itself, whereby it is renewed into the image of God, whereunto it was at first created. This brings all into a perfect harmony. There is not, where gospel truth is effectually received and experienced in the soul, only a consonancy merely between the soul and the word, but between the soul and Christ by the word, and the soul and God by Christ. And this gives assured establishment unto the soul in the things that it doth believe. Divine truth so conveyed unto us is firm, stable, and immovable; and we can say of it in a spiritual sense, "'That which

Digitized by Google

we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life,' we know to be true." Yea, a believer is a testimony to the certainty of truth in what he is, much beyond what he is in all that he saith. Words may be pretended; real effects have their testimony inseparably annexed unto them.

(3.) Hence it appears that *there must needs be great assurance of those truths which are thus received and believed;* for hereby are "the senses exercised to discern both good and evil," Heb. v. 14. Where there is a spiritual sense of truth, of the good and evil that is in doctrines, from an inward experience of what is so good, and from thence an aversation unto the contrary, and this obtained διὰ τὴν ἕξιν, by reason of a habit or an habitual frame of heart, there is strength, there is steadfastness and assurance. This is the teaching of the unction, which will not, which cannot, deceive. Hence many of old and of late that could not dispute could yet die for the truth. He that came to another, and went about to prove by sophistical reasonings that there was no such thing as motion, had only this return from him, who either was not able to answer his cavilling or unwilling to put himself to trouble about it,—he arose, and, walking up and down, gave him a real confutation of his sophistry. It is so in this case. When a soul hath a real experience of the grace of God, of the pardon of sins, of the virtue and efficacy of the death of Christ, of justification by his blood, and peace with God by believing; let men, or devils, or angels from heaven, oppose these things, if it cannot answer their sophisms, yet he can rise up and walk,—he can, with all holy confidence and assurance, oppose his own satisfying experience unto all their arguings and suggestions. A man will not be disputed out of what he sees and feels; and a believer will abide as firmly by his spiritual sense as any man can by his natural.

This is the meaning of that prayer of the apostle, Col. ii. 2, "That your hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ." Understanding in the mysteries of the gospel they had; but he prays that, by a farther experience of it, they might come to the "assurance of understanding." To be true, is the property of the doctrine itself; to be certain or assured, is the property of our minds. Now, this experience doth so unite the mind and truth, that we say, "Such a truth is most certain;" whereas certainty is indeed the property of our minds or their knowledge, and not of the truth known. It is certain unto us; that is, we have an assured knowledge of it by the experience we have of it. This is the assurance of understanding here mentioned. And he farther prays that we may come to the "riches" of this assur-

Digitized by Google

ance,—that is, to an abundant, plentiful assurance; and that εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν, "to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God," owning it from a sense and experience of its excellency and worth.

And this is in the nature of all gospel truths,—they are fitted and suited to be experienced by a believing soul. There is nothing in them so sublime and high, nothing so mysterious, nothing so seemingly low and outwardly contemptible, but that a gracious soul hath experience of an excellency, reality, power, and efficacy in it all. For instance, look on that which concerns the order and worship of the gospel. This seems to many to be a mere external thing, whereof a soul can have no inward sense or relish. Notions there are many about it, and endless contentions, but what more? Why, let a gracious soul, in simplicity and sincerity of spirit, give up himself to walk with Christ according to his appointment, and he shall quickly find such a taste and relish in the fellowship of the gospel, in the communion of saints, and of Christ amongst them, as that he shall come up to such riches of assurance in the understanding and acknowledgment of the ways of the Lord, as others by their disputing can never attain unto. What is so high, glorious, and mysterious as the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity? Some wise men have thought meet to keep it vailed from ordinary Christians, and some have delivered it in such terms as that they can understand nothing by them. But take a believer who hath tasted how gracious the Lord is, in the eternal love of the Father, the great undertaking of the Son in the work of mediation and redemption, with the almighty work of the Spirit creating grace and comfort in the soul; and hath had an experience of the love, holiness, and power of God in them all; and he will with more firm confidence adhere to this mysterious truth, being led into it and confirmed in it by some few plain testimonies of the word, than a thousand disputers shall do who only have the notion of it in their minds. Let a real trial come, and this will appear. Few will be found to sacrifice their lives on bare speculations. Experience will give assurance and stability.

We have thus cleared the credit of the testimony now to be improved. It is evident, on these grounds, that there is a great certainty in those truths whereof believers have experience. Where they communicate their power unto the heart, they give an unquestionable assurance of their truth; and when that is once realized in the soul, all disputes about it are put to silence.

These things being so, let us inquire into the faith and experience of the saints on the earth as to what they know of the truth proposed unto confirmation, namely, that there is forgiveness with God. Let us go to some poor soul that now walks comfortably under the light of God's countenance, and say unto him, "Did we not know

Digitized by Google

you some while since to be full of sadness and great anxiety of spirit; yea, sorrowful almost to death, and bitter in soul?"—*Ans.* "Yes," saith he, "so it was, indeed. My days were consumed with mourning, and my life with sorrow; and I walked heavily, in fear and bitterness of spirit, all the day long."

"Why, what ailed you, what was the matter with you, seeing as to outward things you were in peace?"—*Ans.* "The law of God had laid hold upon me and slain me. I found myself thereby a woful sinner, yea, overwhelmed with the guilt of sin. Every moment I expected tribulation and wrath from the hand of God; my sore ran in the night and ceased not, and my soul refused comfort."

"How is it, then, that you are thus delivered, that you are no more sad? Where have you found ease and peace? Have you been by any means delivered, or did your trouble wear off and depart of its own accord?"—*Ans.* "Alas, no! had I not met with an effectual remedy, I had sunk and everlastingly perished."

"What course did you take?"—*Ans.* "I went unto *Him* by Jesus Christ against whom I have sinned, and have found him better unto me than I could expect or ever should have believed, had not he overpowered my heart by his Spirit. Instead of wrath, which I feared, and that justly, because I had deserved it, he said unto me in Christ, 'Fury is not in me.' For a long time I thought it impossible that there should be mercy and pardon for me, or such a one as I. But he still supported me, sometimes by one means, sometimes by another; until, taking my soul near to himself, he caused me to see the folly of my unbelieving heart, and the vileness of the hard thoughts I had of him, and that, indeed, there is with him forgiveness and plenteous redemption. This hath taken away all my sorrows, and given me quietness, with rest and assurance."

"But are you sure, now, that this is so? May you not possibly be deceived?"—*Ans.* Says the soul, "I have not the least *suspicion* of any such matter; and if at any time aught doth arise to that purpose, it is quickly overcome."

"But how are you confirmed in this persuasion?"—*Ans.* "That *sense* of it which I have in my heart; that *sweetness* and rest which I have experience of; that *influence* it hath upon my soul; that *obligation* I find laid upon me by it unto all thankful obedience; that relief, supportment, and consolation that it hath afforded me in trials and troubles, in the mouth of the grave and entrances of eternity,—all answering what is declared concerning these things in the word,—will not suffer me to be deceived. I could not, indeed, receive it until God was pleased to speak it unto me; but now let Satan do his utmost, I shall never cease to bear this testimony, that there is mercy and forgiveness with him."

Digitized by Google

How many thousands may we find of these in the world, who have had such a seal of this truth in their hearts, as they can not only securely lay down their lives in the confirmation of it, if called thereunto, but also do cheerfully and triumphantly venture their eternal concernments upon it! yea, this is the rise of all that peace, serenity of mind, and strong consolation, which in this world they are made partakers of.

Now this is to me, on the principles before laid down, an evidence great and important. God hath not manifested this truth unto the saints, thus copied it out of his word, and exemplified it in their souls, to leave them under any possibility of being deceived.

Institution of religious worship an evidence of forgiveness.

VII. *God's institution of religious worship, and honour therein to be rendered unto him by sinners,* is another evidence that there is forgiveness with him. I have instanced before in one particular of worship to this purpose,—namely, in that of sacrifices; but therein we intended only their particular nature and signification, how they declared and manifested reconciliation, atonement, and pardon. That now aimed at is, to show how all the worship that God hath appointed unto us, and all the honour which we give unto his holy majesty thereby, is built upon the same foundation,—namely, a supposition of forgiveness,—and is appointed to teach it, and to ascertain us of it; which shall briefly be declared. To this end observe,—

1. That the *general end of all divine and religious worship is to raise unto God a revenue of glory out of the creation.* Such is God's infinite natural self-sufficiency, that he stands in need of no such glory and honour. He was in himself no less infinitely and eternally glorious before the creation of all or any thing whatever, than he will be when he shall be encompassed about with the praises of all the works of his hands. And such is his absolute perfection, that no honour given unto him, no admiration of him, no ascription of glory and praise, can add any thing unto him. Hence saith the psalmist, "My goodness extendeth not to thee," Ps. xvi. 2;—"It doth not so reach thee as to add unto thee, to profit thee, as it may do the saints that are on earth." As he in Job, chap. xxii. 2, 3, "Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?" There is no doubt but that it is well-pleasing unto God that we should be

Digitized by Google

righteous and upright; but we do him not a pleasure therein, as though he stood in need of it, or it were advantage or gain unto him. And again, chap. xxxv. 7, "If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he at thine hand?" And the reason of all this the apostle gives us, Rom. xi. 36, "Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things." Being the first sovereign cause and last absolute end of all things, every way perfect and self-sufficient, nothing can be added unto him: or, as the same apostle speaks, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, is not worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth unto all life, and breath, and all things," Acts xvii. 24, 25; as he himself pleads at large, Ps. l. 7–13.

2. Wherefore, *all the revenue of glory that God will receive by his worship depends merely on his own voluntary choice and appointment.* All worship, I say, depends now on the sovereign will and pleasure of God. It is true there is a natural worship due from rational creatures by the law of their creation. This was indispensably and absolutely necessary at first. The very being of God and order of things required that it should be so. Supposing that God had made such creatures as we are, it could not be but that moral obedience was due unto him,—namely, that he should be believed in, trusted, and obeyed, as the first cause, last end, and sovereign Lord of all. But the entrance of sin, laying the sinner absolutely under the curse of God, utterly put an end to this order of things. Man was now to have perished immediately, and an end to be put unto the law of this obedience. But here, in the sovereign will of God, an interposition was made between sin and the sentence, and man was respited from destruction. All worship following hereon, even that which was before natural, by the law of creation, is now resolved into an arbitrary act of God's will.

And unto this end is all worship designed,—namely, to give glory unto God. For as God hath said that "he will be sanctified in all that draw nigh him,"—that is, in his worship,—and that therein "he will be glorified," Lev. x. 3; and that "he that offereth him praise,"—that is, performeth any part of his worship and service,—"glorifieth him," Ps. l. 23: so the nature of the thing itself declareth that it can have no other end. By this he hath all his glory, even from the inanimate creation.

3. Consider that *God hath not prescribed any worship of himself unto the angels that sinned.* They are, indeed, under his power, and he useth them as he pleaseth, to serve the ends of his holy providence. Bounds he prescribes unto them by his power, and keeps them in dread of the full execution of his wrath; but he requires not of them that they should believe in him. They believe, indeed,

Digitized by Google

and tremble. They have a natural apprehension of the being, power, providence, holiness, and righteousness of God, which is inseparable from their natures; and they have an expectation from thence of that punishment and vengeance which is due unto them, which is inseparable from them as sinners; and this is their faith: but to believe in God,—that is, to put their trust in him, to resign up themselves unto him,—God requires it not of them. The same is the case with them also as to love, and fear, and delight,—all inward affections, which are the proper worship of God. These they have not, nor doth God any longer require them in them. They eternally cast them off in their first sin. And where these are not, where they are not required, where they cannot be, there no outward worship can be prescribed or appointed; for external instituted worship is nothing but the way that God assigns and chooseth us to express and exercise the inward affections of our minds towards him. He rules the fallen angels "per nutum providentiæ," not "verbum præcepti." Now, as God dealt with the angels, so also would he have dealt with mankind, had he left them all under the curse, without remedy or hope of relief. As he doth with them,—he eternally satisfies himself in that revenue of glory which ariseth unto him in their punishment,—so also he would have done with these, had there been no forgiveness with him for them. He would not have required them to fear, love, or obey him, or have appointed unto them any way of worship whereby to express such affections towards him; for to what end should he have done it? What righteousness would admit that service, duty, and obedience should be prescribed unto them who could not, ought not to have any expectation or hope of acceptance or reward? This is contrary to the very first notion which God requires in us of his nature: for "he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," Heb. xi. 6; which would not be so should he appoint a voluntary worship, and not propose a reward to the worshippers. Wherefore,—

4. It is evident that *God, by the prescription of a worship unto sinners, doth fully declare that there is forgiveness with him for them;* for,—

(1.) He manifests thereby that he is willing to receive a *new revenue of glory from them.* This, as we have proved, is the end of worship. This he would never have done but with a design of accepting and rewarding his creatures; for do we think that he will be beholding unto them?—that he will take and admit of their voluntary, reasonable service, according to his will and command, without giving them a reward, yea, and such a one as their obedience holds no proportion unto? No such thing would become his infinite self-sufficiency, goodness, and bounty. This the wife of Manoah well

Digitized by Google

pleads, Judges xiii. 23: "If," saith she, "the LORD were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt-offering and a meat-offering at our hands." His acceptance of worship from us is an infallible demonstration that he will not execute against us the severity of the first curse. And this is clearly evidenced in the first record of solemn instituted worship performed by sinners: Gen. iv. 4, "The LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering." Some think that God gave a visible pledge of his acceptance of Abel and his offering. It may be it was by fire from heaven; for how else should Cain so instantly know that his brother and his offering were accepted, but that he and his were refused? However it were, it is evident that what testimony God gave of the acceptance of his offering, the same he gave concerning his person; and that in the first place he had respect unto Abel, and then to his offering. And therefore the apostle saith that thereby "he obtained witness that he was righteous," Heb. xi. 4,—that is, the witness or testimony of God himself. Now, this was in the forgiveness of his sins, without which he could neither be righteous nor accepted, for he was a sinner. This God declared by acceptance of his worship. And thus we also, if we have any testimony of God's acceptance of us in any part of his worship, should employ it to the same end. Hath God enlarged our hearts in prayer? hath he given us an answer unto any of our supplications? hath he refreshed our hearts in the preaching and dispensation of the word, or any other ordinance? We are not to rest in the particular about which our communion with him hath been;—our doing so is the cause why we lose our experiences; they lie scattered up and down, separated from their proper root, and so are easily lost: but this is that which we should first improve such particular experiences in the worship of God unto,—namely, that God *hath pardoned our sins*, and accepted our persons thereon; for without that, none of our worship or service would please him or be accepted with him.

(2.) Hereby God lets us know that he deals with us upon *new terms, so that, notwithstanding sin, we may enjoy his love and favour.* For this we have the engagement of his truth and veracity, and he cannot deceive us. But yet by this command of his for his worship we should be deceived, if there were no forgiveness with him; for it gives us encouragement to expect, and assurance of finding, acceptance with him, which without it cannot be obtained. This, then, God declares by his institution of and command for his worship,—namely, that there is nothing that shall indispensably hinder those who give up themselves unto obedience of God's commands from enjoying his love and favour, and communion with him.

(3.) For *matter of fact*, it is known and confessed that God hath *appointed a worship for sinners to perform* All the institutions of

Digitized by Google

the Old and New Testament bear witness hereunto. God was the author of them. And men know not what they do when either they neglect them or would be intermixing their own imaginations with them. What can the mind of man conceive or invent that may have any influence into this matter, to secure the souls of believers of their acceptance with God? Is there any need of their testimony to the truth, faithfulness, and goodness of God? These things he hath taken upon himself. This, then, is that which is to be fixed on our souls upon our first invitation unto religious worship,—namely, that God intends a new revenue of glory from us, and therefore declares that there is a way for the taking away of our sins, without which we can give no glory to him by our obedience; and this is done only by forgiveness.

5. There are *some ordinances of worship appointed for this very end and purpose, to confirm unto us the forgiveness of sin*, especially in that worship which is instituted by the Lord Jesus under the New Testament. I shall instance in one or two:—

(1.) The *ordinance of baptism*. This was accompanied with the dawning of the gospel in the ministry of John the Baptist; and he expressly declared, in his sermons upon it, that it was instituted of God to declare the "remission of sins," Mark i. 4.

It is true the Lord Christ submitted unto that ordinance and was baptized by John, who had no sin; but this belonged unto the obedience which God required of him, as for our sakes he was made under the law. He was to observe all ordinances and institutions of the worship of God, not for any need he had in his own person of the especial ends and significations of some of them; yet, as he was our sponsor, surety, and mediator, standing in our stead in all that he so did, he was to yield obedience unto them, that so he might "fulfil all righteousness," Matt. iii. 15. So was he circumcised, so he was baptized, both which had respect unto sin, though absolutely free from all sin in his own person; and that because he was free from no obedience unto any command of God.

But, as was said, baptism itself, as appointed to be an ordinance of worship for sinners to observe, was a declaration of that forgiveness that is with God. It was so in its first institution. God calls a man in a marvellous and miraculous manner; gives him a ministry from heaven; commands him to go and baptize all those who, confessing their sins, and professing repentance of them, should come to him to have a testimony of forgiveness. And as to the especial nature of this ordinance, he appoints it to be such as to represent the certainty and truth of his grace in pardon unto their senses by a visible pledge. He lets them know that he would take away their sin, wherein their spiritual defilement doth consist, even as water takes away the out-

Digitized by Google

ward filth of the body; and that hereby they shall be saved, as surely as Noah and his family were saved in the ark swimming upon the waters, 1 Pet. iii. 21. Now, how great a deceit must needs in this whole matter have been put upon poor sinners, if it were not infallibly certain that they might obtain forgiveness with God!

After the entrance of this ordinance in the ministry of John, the Lord Christ takes it into his own hand, and commands the observation of it unto all his disciples. I dispute not now who are the proper immediate objects of it; whether they only who actually can make profession of their faith, or believers with their infant seed. For my part, I believe that all whom Christ loves and pardons are to be made partakers of the pledge thereof. And the sole reason which they of old insisted on why the infants of believing parents should not be baptized was, because they thought they had no sin; and therein we know their mistake. But I treat not now of these things. Only this I say is certain, that in the prescription of this ordinance unto his church, the great intention of the Lord Christ was to ascertain unto us the forgiveness of sins. And sinners are invited to a participation of this ordinance for that end, that they may receive the pardon of their sins; that is, an infallible pledge and assurance of it, Acts ii. 38. And the very nature of it declareth this to be its end, as was before intimated. This is another engagement of the truth, and faithfulness, and holiness of God, so that we cannot be deceived in this matter. "There is," saith God, "forgiveness with me." Saith the soul, "How, Lord, shall I know, how shall I come to be assured of it? for by reason of the perpetual accusations of conscience, and the curse of the law upon the guilt of my sin, I find it a very hard matter for me to believe. Like Gideon, I would have a token of it." "Why, behold," saith God, "I will give thee a pledge and a token of it, which cannot deceive thee. When the world of old had been overwhelmed with a deluge of waters by reason of their sins, and those who remained, though they had just cause to fear that the same judgment would again befall them or their posterity, because they saw there was like to be the same cause of it, the thoughts and imaginations of the hearts of men being evil still, and that continually; to secure them against these fears, I told them that I would destroy the earth no more with water, and I gave them a token of my faithfulness therein by placing my bow in the cloud. And have I failed them? Though the sin and wickedness of the world hath been, since that day, unspeakably great, yet mankind is not drowned again, nor ever shall be. I will not deceive their expectation from the token I have given them. Wherever, then, there is a word of promise confirmed with a token, never fear a disappointment. But so is this matter. I

Digitized by Google

have declared that there is forgiveness with me; and, to give you assurance thereof, I have ordained this pledge and sign as a seal of my word, to take away all doubts and suspicion of your being deceived. As the world shall be drowned no more, so neither shall they who believe come short of forgiveness."

And this is the use which we ought to make of this ordinance. It is God's security of the pardon of our sins, which we may safely rest in.

(2.) The same is the end of that other great ordinance of the church, *the supper of the Lord*. The same thing is therein confirmed unto us by another sign, pledge, token, or seal. We have shown before what respect gospel forgiveness hath unto the death or blood of Jesus Christ. That is the means whereby for us it is procured, the way whereby it comes forth from God, unto the glory of his righteousness and grace; which afterward must be more distinctly insisted on. This ordinance, therefore, designed and appointed on purpose for the representation and calling to remembrance of the death of Christ, with the communication of the benefits thereof unto them that believe, doth principally intend our faith and comfort in the truth under consideration. And, therefore, in the very institution of it, besides the general end before mentioned, which had been sufficient for our security, there is moreover added an especial mention of the forgiveness of sin; for so speaks our Saviour, in the institution of it for the use of the church unto the end of the world: Matt. xxvi. 28, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." As if he had said, "The end for which I have appointed the observance of this duty and service unto you is, that I may testify thereby unto you that by my blood, the sacrifice of myself, and the atonement made thereby, I have purchased for you the remission of your sins; which you shall assuredly be made partakers of." And more I shall not add unto this consideration, because the death of Christ, respected in this ordinance, will again occur unto us.

(3.) What is the end of all *church-order*, assemblies, and worship? What is a church? Is it not a company of sinners gathered together, according unto God's appointment, to give glory and praise to him for pardoning grace, for the forgiveness of sins, and to yield him that obedience which he requires from us on the account of his having so dealt with us? This is the nature, this is the end of a church. He that understandeth it not, he that useth it not unto that end, doth but abuse that great institution. And such abuse the world is full of. Some endeavour to make their own secular advantages by the pretence of the church; some discharge the duty required in it with some secret hopes that it shall be their

Digitized by Google

righteousness before God; some answer only their light and convictions in an empty profession. This alone is the true end, the true use of it:—We assemble ourselves to learn that there is forgiveness with God through Christ; to pray that we may be made partakers of it; to bless and praise God for our interest in it; to engage ourselves unto that obedience which he requires upon the account of it. And were this constantly upon our minds and in our designs, we might be more established in the faith of it than, it may be, the most of us are.

6. One particular instance more of this nature shall conclude this evidence:—*God hath commanded us, the Lord Christ hath taught us, to pray for the pardon of sin;* which gives us unquestionable security that it may be attained, that it is to be found in God. For the clearing whereof observe,—

(1.) That the Lord Christ, in the revelation of the will of God unto us, as unto the duty that he required at our hands, hath taught and *instructed us to pray for the forgiveness of sin.* It is one of the petitions which he hath left on record for our use and imitation in that summary of all prayer which he hath given us: Matt. vi. 12, "Forgive us our debts," our trespasses, our sins. Some contend that this is a form of prayer to be used in the prescript limited words of it. All grant that it is a rule for prayer, comprising the heads of all necessary things that we are to pray for, and obliging us to make supplications for them. So, then, upon the authority of God, revealed unto us by Jesus Christ, we are bound in duty to pray for pardon of sins or forgiveness.

(2.) On this supposition it is the *highest blasphemy* and reproach of God imaginable, to conceive that there is not forgiveness with him for us. Indeed, if we should go upon our own heads, without his warranty and authority, to ask any thing at his hand, we might well expect to meet with disappointment; for what should encourage us unto any such boldness? but now, when God himself shall command us to come and ask any thing from him,—so making it thereby our duty, and that the neglect thereof should be our great sin and rebellion against him,—to suppose he hath not the thing in his power to bestow on us, or that his will is wholly averse from so doing, is to reproach him with want of truth, faithfulness, and holiness, and not to be God. For what sincerity can be in such proceedings? Is it consistent with any divine excellency? Could it have any other end but to deceive poor creatures? either to delude them if they do pray according to his command, or to involve them in farther guilt if they do not? God forbid any such thoughts should enter into our hearts. But,—

(3.) To put this whole matter out of the question, *God hath promised to hear our prayers,* and in particular those which we make

Digitized by Google

unto him for the forgiveness of sin. So our Saviour hath assured us that what we ask in his name it shall be done for us. And he hath, as we have showed, taught us to ask this very thing of God as our heavenly Father,—that is, in his name; for in and through him alone is he a Father unto us. I need not insist on particular promises to this purpose; they are, as you know, multiplied in the Scriptures.

What hath been spoken may suffice to establish our present argument,—namely, that God's prescription of religious worship unto sinners doth undeniably prove that with him there is forgiveness; especially considering that the principal parts of the worship so prescribed and appointed by him are peculiarly designed to confirm us in the faith thereof.

And this is the design of the words that we do insist upon: "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." The fear of God, as we have showed, in the Old Testament, doth frequently express, not that gracious affection of our minds which is distinctly so called, but that whole worship of God, wherein that and all other gracious affections towards God are to be exercised. Now, the psalmist tells us that the foundation of this fear or worship, and the only motive and encouragement for sinners to engage in it and give up themselves unto it, is this, that there is forgiveness with God. Without this no sinner could fear, serve, or worship him. This, therefore, is undeniably proved by the institution of this worship, which was proposed unto confirmation.

The end of all these things, as we shall afterward at large declare, is to encourage poor sinners to believe, and to evidence how inexcusable they will be left who, notwithstanding all this, do, through the power of their lusts and unbelief, refuse to come to God in Christ that they may be pardoned. Yea, the laying open of the certainty and fulness of the evidence given unto this truth makes it plain and conspicuous whence it is that men perish in and for their sins. Is it for *want of mercy*, goodness, grace, or patience in God? Is it through any *defect in the mediation* of the Lord Christ? Is it for *want of the mightiest encouragements* and most infallible assurances that with God there is forgiveness? Not at all; but merely on the account of their own obstinacy, stubbornness, and perverseness. They will not come unto this light, yea, they hate it, because their deeds are evil. They will not come to Christ, that they may have life. It is merely darkness, blindness, and love of sin that brings men to destruction. And this is laid open, and all pretences and excuses are removed, and the shame of men's lusts made naked, by the full confirmation of this truth which God hath furnished us withal.

Take heed, you that hear or read these things; if they are not mixed with faith, they will add greatly to your misery. Every ar-

Digitized by Google

gument will be your torment. But these considerations must be insisted on afterward.

Moreover, if you will take into your minds what hath been delivered in particular concerning the nature and end of the worship of God which you attend unto, you may be instructed in the use and due observation of it. When you address yourselves unto it, remember that this is that which God requires of you who are sinners; that this he would not have done but with thoughts and intention of mercy for sinners. Bless him with all your souls that this is laid as the foundation of all that you have to do with him. You are not utterly cast off because you are sinners. Let this support and warm your hearts when you go to hear, to pray, or any duty of worship. Consider what is your principal work in the whole. You are going to deal with God about forgiveness, in the being, causes, consequents, and effects of it. Hearken what he speaks, declares, or reveals about it; mix his revelation and promises with faith. Inquire diligently into all the obedience and thankfulness, all those duties of holiness and righteousness, which he justly expects from them who are made partakers of it. So shall you observe the worship of God unto his glory and your own advantage.

The giving and establishing of the new covenant another evidence of forgiveness with God—The oath of God engaged in the confirmation thereof.

VIII. ANOTHER evidence hereof may be taken from the *making, establishing, and ratifying of the new covenant.* That God would make a new covenant with his people is often promised, often declared: see, among other places, Jer. xxxi. 31, 32. And that he hath done so accordingly the apostle at large doth manifest, Heb. viii. 8–12. Now, herein sundry things unto our present purpose may be considered; for,—

First, It is supposed that God had before made *another covenant* with mankind. With reference hereunto is this said to be a *new* one. It is opposed unto another that was before it, and in comparison whereof that is called *old* and this said to be *new*, as the apostle speaks expressly in the place before mentioned. Now, a covenant between God and man is a thing great and marvellous, whether we consider the nature of it or the ends of it. In its own nature it is a convention, compact, and agreement for some certain ends and purposes between the holy Creator and his poor creatures. How infinite, how unspeakable must needs the grace and condescen-

Digitized by Google

sion of God in this matter be! For what is poor miserable man, that God should set his heart upon him,—that he should, as it were, give bounds to his sovereignty over him, and enter into terms of agreement with him? For whereas before he was a mere object of his absolute dominion, made at his will and for his pleasure, and on the same reasons to be crushed at any time into nothing; now he hath a bottom and ground given him to stand upon, whereon to expect good things from God upon the account of his faithfulness and righteousness. God in a covenant gives those holy properties of his nature unto his creature, as his hand or arm for him to lay hold upon, and by them to plead and argue with him. And without this a man could have no foundation for any intercourse or communion with God, or of any expectation from him, nor any direction how to deal with him in any of his concernments. Great and signal, then, was the condescension of God, to take his poor creature into covenant with himself; and especially will this be manifest if we consider the ends of it, and why it is that God thus deals with man. Now, these are no other than that man might serve him aright, be blessed by him, and be brought unto the everlasting enjoyment of him;—all unto his glory. These are the ends of every covenant that God takes us into with himself; and these are "the whole of man," [Eccles. xii. 13.] No more is required of us in a way of duty, no more can be required by us to make us blessed and happy, but what is contained in them. That we might live to God, be accepted with him, and come to the eternal fruition of him, is the whole of man, all that we were made for or are capable of; and these are the ends of every covenant that God makes with men, being all comprised in that solemn word, that "he will be their God, and they shall be his people."

Secondly, This being the nature, this the end of a covenant, there must be some great and important cause to change, alter, and *abrogate a covenant once made* and established,—to lay aside one covenant and *to enter into another.* And yet this the apostle says expressly that God had done, Heb. viii. 13, and proves it, because himself calls that which he promised a *new covenant:* which undeniably confirms two things;—first, That the other was become old; and, secondly, That being become so, it was changed, altered, and removed. I know the apostle speaks immediately of the old administration of the covenant under the Old Testament of Mosaical institutions; but he doth so with reference unto that revival which in it was given to the first covenant made with Adam: for in the giving of the law, and the curse wherewith it was accompanied, which were immixed with that administration of the covenant, there was a solemn revival and representation of the first covenant and its sanction, whereby it had

Digitized by Google

life and power given it to keep the people in bondage all their days. And the end of the abolition, or taking away of the legal administration of the covenant, was merely to take out of God's dealing with his people all use and remembrance of the first covenant. As was said, therefore, to take away, disannul, and change a covenant so made, ratified, and established betwixt God and man, is a matter that must be resolved into some cogent, important, and indispensable cause. And this will the more evidently appear if we consider,—

1. In general, that *the first covenant was good*, holy, righteous, and equal. It was such as became God to make, and was every way the happiness of the creature to accept of. We need no other argument to prove it holy and good than this, that God made it. It was the effect of infinite holiness, wisdom, righteousness, goodness, and grace; and therefore in itself was it every way perfect, for so are all the works of God. Besides, it was such as man, when through his own fault he cannot obtain any good by it, and must perish everlastingly by virtue of the curse of it, yet cannot but subscribe unto its righteousness and holiness. The law was the rule of it; therein is the tenor of it contained. Now, saith the apostle, "Whatever becomes of the sin and the sinner, 'the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and just, and good,'" Rom. vii. 12;—holy in itself and its own nature, as being the order and constitution of the most holy God; just and equal with reference unto us, such as we have no reason to complain of, or repine against the authority of; and the terms of it are most righteous. And not only so, but it is good also; that which, notwithstanding the appearance of rigour and severity which it is accompanied withal, had in it an exceeding mixture of goodness and grace, both in the obedience constituted in it and the reward annexed unto it; as might be more fully manifested were that our present work.

2. In particular, [First], It was good, holy, and righteous in all *the commands of it*, in the obedience which it required.

And two things there were that rendered it exceeding righteous in reference unto its precepts or *commands*. First, That they were all suited unto *the principles of the nature of man* created by God, and in the regular acting whereof consisted his perfection. God in the first covenant required nothing of man, prescribed nothing unto him, but what there was a principle for the doing and accomplishing of it ingrafted and implanted on his nature, which rendered all those commands equal, holy, and good; for what need any man complain of that which requires nothing of him but what he is from his own frame and principles inclined unto? Secondly, All the commands of it were proportionate unto *the strength and ability of them* to whom they were given. God in that covenant required nothing of any

Digitized by Google

man but what he had before enabled him to perform, nothing above his strength or beyond his power; and thence was it also righteous.

Secondly, It was exceeding good, holy, and righteous, upon the account of its *promises and rewards*. "Do this," saith the covenant; "this which thou art able to do, which the principles of thy nature are fitted for and inclined unto." Well, what shall be the issue thereof? Why, "Do this, and live." Life is promised unto obedience, and that such a life as, both for the present and future condition of the creature, was accompanied with every thing that was needful to make it blessed and happy. Yea, this life having in it the eternal enjoyment of God, God himself, as a reward, was exceedingly above whatever the obedience of man could require as due, or have any reason, on any other account but merely of the goodness of God, to expect.

3. There was provision in that covenant *for the preservation and manifestation of the glory of God*, whatever was the event on the part of man. This was provided for in the wisdom and righteousness of God. Did man continue in his obedience, and fulfil the terms of the covenant, all things were laid in subserviency to the eternal glory of God in his reward. Herein would he for ever have manifested and exalted the glory of his holiness, power, faithfulness, righteousness, and goodness. As an almighty Creator and Preserver, as a faithful God and righteous Rewarder, would he have been glorified. On supposition, on the other side, that man by sin and rebellion should transgress the terms and tenor of this covenant, yet God had made provision that no detriment unto his glory should ensue thereon; for by the constitution of a punishment proportionable in his justice unto that sin and demerit, he had provided that the glory of his holiness, righteousness, and veracity, in his threatenings, should be exalted, and that to all eternity. God would have lost no more glory and honour by the sin of man than by the sin of angels, which, in his infinite wisdom and righteousness, is become a great theatre of his eternal glory; for he is no less excellent in his greatness and severity than in his goodness and power.

Wherefore, we may now return unto our former inquiry: All things being thus excellently and admirably disposed, in infinite wisdom and holiness, in this covenant, the whole duty and blessedness of man being fully provided for, and the glory of God absolutely secured upon all events, what was the reason that God left not all things to stand or fall according to the terms of it? wherefore doth he reject and lay aside this covenant, and promise to make another, and do so accordingly? Certain it is that he might have continued it with a blessed security to his own glory; and he "makes all things for himself, even the wicked for the day of evil."

Digitized by Google

God himself shows what was the only and sole reason of this dispensation, Heb. viii. 7–13. The sum of it is this:—Notwithstanding the blessed constitution of the first covenant, yet there was no provision for the *pardon of sin*, no room or place for forgiveness in it; but on supposition that man sinned, he was in that covenant left remediless. God had not in it revealed that there was any such thing as forgiveness with him; nor had any sinner the least hope or grounds of expectation from thence of any such thing in him. Die he must, and perish, and that without remedy or recovery. "Now," saith God, "this must not be. Mercy, goodness, grace, require another state of things. This covenant will not manifest them; their effects will not be communicated to poor sinners by it. Hence," saith he, "it is faulty,—that is, defective. I will not lose the glory of them, nor shall sinners be unrelieved by them. And, therefore, although I may strictly tie up all mankind unto the terms of this, yet I will make another covenant with them, wherein they shall know and find that there is forgiveness with me, that they may fear me."

Now, next to the blood of Christ, whereby this covenant was ratified and confirmed, this is the greatest evidence that can possibly be given that there is forgiveness with God. To what end else doth God make this great alteration in the effects of his will, in his way of dealing with mankind? As forgiveness of sin is expressly contained in the tenor and words of the covenant, so set it aside, and it will be of no more use or advantage than the former; for as this covenant is made directly with sinners, nor was there any one in the world when God made it that was not a sinner, nor is it of use unto any but sinners, so is forgiveness of sins the very life of it.

Hence we may see two things;—first, The *greatness* of forgiveness, that we may learn to value it; and, secondly, The *certainty* of it, that we may learn to believe it.

First, The *greatness* of it. God would not do so great a thing as that mentioned but for a great, the greatest end. Had it not been a matter of the greatest importance unto the glory of God and the good of the souls of men, God would not for the sake of it have laid aside one covenant and made another. We may evidently see how the heart of God was set upon it, how his nature and will were engaged in it. All this was done that we might be pardoned. The old glorious fabric of obedience and rewards shall be taken down to the ground, that a new one may be erected for the honour and glory of forgiveness. God forbid that we should have slight thoughts of that which was so strangely and wonderfully brought forth, wherein God had as it were embarked his great glory! Shall all this be done for our sakes, and shall we undervalue it or disesteem it? God for-

Digitized by Google

bid. God could, if I may so say, more easily have made a new world of innocent creatures, and have governed them by the old covenant, than have established this new one for the salvation of poor sinners; but then, where had been the glory of forgiveness? It could never have been known that there was forgiveness with him. The old covenant could not have been preserved and sinners pardoned. Wherefore, God chose rather to leave the covenant than sinners unrelieved, than grace unexalted and pardon unexercised. Prize it as you prize your souls; and give glory unto God for it, as all those that believe will do unto eternity.

Secondly, For the *security* of it, that we may believe it. What greater can be given? God deceiveth no man, no more than he is deceived. And what could God, that cannot lie, do more to give us satisfaction herein than he hath done? Would you be made partakers of this forgiveness?—go unto God, spread before him this whole matter; plead with him that he himself hath so far laid aside the first covenant, of his own gracious will, as to make a new one, and that merely because it had no forgiveness in it. This he hath made on purpose that it might be known that there is forgiveness in him. And shall not we now be made partakers of it? will he now deny that unto us which he hath given such assurance of, and raised such expectations concerning it? Nothing can here wrong us, nothing can ruin us, but unbelief. Lay hold on this covenant, and we shall have pardon. This God expresseth, Isa. xxvii. 4, 5. Will we continue on the old bottom of the first covenant? All that we can do thereon is but to set thorns and briers in the way of God, to secure ourselves from his coming against us and upon us with his indignation and fury. Our sins are so, and our righteousness is no better. And what will be the issue? Both they and we shall be trodden down, consumed, and burnt up. What way, then, what remedy is left unto us? Only this of laying hold on the arm and strength of God in that covenant wherein forgiveness of sin is provided. Therein alone he saith, "Fury is not in me." And the end will be that we shall have peace with him, both here and for ever.

IX. *The oath of God engaged and interposed in this matter* is another evidence of the truth insisted on. Now, because this is annexed unto the covenant before mentioned, and is its establishment, I shall pass it over the more briefly. And in it we may consider,—

First, *The nature of the oath of God.* The apostle tells us that "He sware by himself;" and he gives this reason of it, "Because he had no greater to swear by," Heb. vi. 13. An oath for the confirmation of any thing is an invocation of a supreme power that can judge

Digitized by Google

of the truth that is spoken, and vindicate the breach of the engagement. This God hath none other but himself: "Because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself." Now, this God doth,—First, By express *affirmation* that he hath so sworn by himself, which was the form of the first solemn oath of God: Gen. xxii. 16, "By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD." The meaning whereof is, "I have taken it upon myself as I am God; or let me not be so, if I perform not this thing." And this is expressed by his *soul:* Jer. li. 14, "The LORD of hosts hath sworn by his soul;" that is, "by himself," as we render the words. Secondly, God doth it by *the especial interposition* of some such property of his nature as is suited to give credit and confirmation to the word spoken;—as of his *holiness*, Ps. lxxxix. 35, "I have sworn by my holiness;" so also Amos iv. 2;—sometimes by his *life*, "As I live, saith the LORD" (חַי־אֲנִי, "I live, saith God"), "it shall be so;"—and sometimes by his *name*, Jer. xliv. 26. God as it were engageth the honour and glory of the properties of his nature for the certain accomplishment of the things mentioned. And this is evident from the manner of the expression, as in that place of Ps. lxxxix. 35, "Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David." So we; in the original the words are elliptical: "If I lie unto David;" that is, "Let me not be so, nor be esteemed to be so, if I lie unto David."

Secondly, For *the end of his oath.* God doth not give it to make his word or promise sure and steadfast, but to give assurance and security unto us of their accomplishment. Every word of God is sure and certain, truth itself, because it is his; and he might justly require of us the belief of it without any farther attestation: but yet, knowing what great objections Satan and our own unbelieving hearts will raise against his promises, at least as to our own concernment in them, to confirm our minds, and to take away all pretences of unbelief, he interposeth his oath in this matter. What can remain of distrust in such a case? If there be a matter in doubt between men, and an oath be interposed in the confirmation of that which is called in question, it is "an end," as the apostle tells us, "unto them of all strife," Heb. vi. 16. How much more ought it to be so on the part of God, when his oath is engaged! And the apostle declares this end of his oath; it is "to show the immutability of his counsel," verse 17. His counsel was declared before in the promise; but now some doubt or *strife* may arise whether, on one occasion or other, God may not change his counsel, or whether he hath not changed it with such conditions as to render it useless unto us. In what case soever it be, to remove all doubts and suspicions of this nature, God adds his oath, manifesting the unquestionable immutability of his counsel and promises. What, therefore, is thus

Digitized by Google

confirmed is ascertained unto the height of what any thing is capable of; and not to believe it is the height of impiety.

Thirdly, In this interposition of God by an oath *there is unspeakable condescension of grace*, which is both an exceeding great motive unto faith and a great aggravation of unbelief; for what are we, that the holy and blessed God should thus condescend unto us, as, for our satisfaction and surety, to engage himself by an oath? One said well of old, "Felices nos quorum causâ Deus jurat! O infelices, si nec juranti Deo credimus;"—"It is an inestimable advantage that God should for our sakes engage himself by his oath. So it will be our misery if we believe him not when he swears unto us." What can we now object against what is thus confirmed? what pretence, colour, or excuse can we have for our unbelief? How just, how righteous, how holy must their destruction be, who, upon this strange, wonderful, and unexpected warranty, refuse to set to their seal that God is true!

These things being premised, we may consider how variously God hath engaged his oath that there is forgiveness with him. First, He *sweareth that he hath no pleasure in the death of a sinner*, but rather that he repent and live: Ezek. xxxiii. 11, "As I live, saith the LORD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Now, without forgiveness in him every sinner must die, and that without remedy. Confirming, therefore, with his oath that it is his will the sinner should return, repent, and live, he doth in the first place swear by himself that there is forgiveness with him for these sinners that shall so repent and turn unto him.

Again: whereas the great means he hath appointed for the forgiveness of sins is by the mediation of the Lord Christ, as we shall afterward show, he hath on several occasions confirmed *his purpose in him, and the counsel of his will, by his oath.* By this oath he promised him unto Abraham and David of old; which proved the foundation of the church's stability in all generations, and also of their security and assurance of acceptance with him. See Luke i. 73–75. And in his taking upon him that office whereby in an especial manner the forgiveness of sins was to be procured,—namely, of his being a priest to offer sacrifice, to make an atonement for sinners,—he confirmed it unto him, and him in it, by his oath: Heb. vii. 20, "He was not made a priest without an oath." And to what end?—namely, that he might be "a surety of a better testament," verse 22. And what was that better testament? Why, that which brought along with it the "forgiveness of sins," chap. viii. 12, 13. So that it was forgiveness which was so confirmed by the oath of God. Farther: the apostle shows that the great original promise made unto Abraham being confirmed by the oath of God, all his other promises were in like

Digitized by Google

manner confirmed; whence he draws that blessed conclusion which we have, chap. vi. 17, 18: "As to every one," saith he, "that flees for refuge to the hope that is set before him,"—that is, who seeks to escape the guilt of sin, the curse and the sentence of the law, by an application of himself unto God in Christ for pardon,—"he hath the oath of God to secure him that he shall not fail thereof." And thus are all the concernments of the forgiveness of sin testified unto by the oath of God; which we have manifested to be the highest security in this matter that God can give or that we are capable of.

The name of God confirming the truth and reality of forgiveness with him—As also the same is done by the properties of his nature.

X. ANOTHER foundation of this truth, and infallible evidence of it, may be taken from *that especial name and title* which God takes unto himself in this matter; for he owns the name of "The God of pardons," or "The God of forgiveness." So is he called, Neh. ix. 17, אֱלוֹהַּ סְלִיחוֹת. We have rendered the words, "Thou art a God ready to pardon;" but they are, as was said, "Thou art a God of pardons," "forgiveness," or "propitiations." That is his name, which he owneth, which he accepteth of the ascription of unto himself; the name whereby he will be known. And to clear this evidence, we must take in some considerations of the name of God and the use thereof; as,—

1. *The name of God is that whereby he reveals himself unto us,* whereby he would have us know him and own him. It is something expressive of his nature or properties which he hath appropriated unto himself. Whatever, therefore, any name of God expresseth him to be, that he is, that we may expect to find him; for he will not deceive us by giving himself a wrong or a false name. And on this account he requires us to trust in his name, because he will assuredly be found unto us what his name imports. Resting on his name, flying unto his name, calling upon his name, praising his name, things so often mentioned in the Scripture, confirm the same unto us. These things could not be our duty if we might be deceived in so doing. God is, then, and will be, to us what his name declareth.

2. On this ground and reason God is said *then first to be known by any name,* when those to whom he reveals himself do, in an especial manner, *rest on that name by faith,* and have that accomplished towards them which that name imports, signifies, or declares. And therefore God did not, under the Old Testament, reveal himself

Digitized by Google

to any by the name of the Father of Jesus Christ or the Son incarnate, because the grace of it unto them was not to be accomplished. "God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect," they were not intrusted with the full revelation of God by all his blessed names. Neither doth God call us to trust in any name of his, however declared or revealed, unless he gives it us in an especial manner, by way of covenant, to rest upon. So he speaks, Exod. vi. 3, "I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob אֵל שַׁדַּי, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah was I not known unto them." It is certain that both these names of God, El-shaddai and Jehovah, were known among his people before. In the first mention we have of Abraham's addressing himself unto the worship of God, he makes use of the name Jehovah: Gen. xii. 7, "He builded an altar unto Jehovah." And so afterward not only doth Moses make use of that name in the repetition of the story, but it was also of frequent use amongst them. Whence, then, is it said that God appeared unto them by the name of El-shaddai, but not by the name of Jehovah? The reason is, because that was the name which God gave himself in the solemn confirmation of the covenant with Abraham: chap. xvii. 1, אֲנִי־אֵל שַׁדַּי,— "I am El-shaddai," "God Almighty," "God All-sufficient." And when Isaac would pray for the blessing of the covenant on Jacob, he makes use of that name: chap. xxviii. 3, "God Almighty bless thee." He invocates that name of God which was engaged in the covenant made with his father Abraham and himself. That, therefore, we may with full assurance rest on the name of God, it is not only necessary that God reveal that name to be his, but also that he give it out unto us for that end and purpose, that we might know him thereby, and place our trust and confidence in him according unto what that name of his imports. And this was the case wherever he revealed himself unto any in a peculiar manner by an especial name. So he did unto Jacob: chap. xxviii. 13, "I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac;" assuring him, that as he dealt faithfully in his covenant with his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, so also he would deal with him. And, chap. xxxi. 13, "I am the God of Beth-el,"—"He who appeared unto thee there, and blessed thee, and will continue so to do." But when the same Jacob comes to ask after another name of God, he answers him not; as it were commanding him to live by faith on what he was pleased to reveal. Now, then, God had not made himself known to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob by his name Jehovah, because he had not peculiarly called himself unto them by that name, nor had engaged it in his covenant with them, although it were otherwise known unto them. They lived and rested on the name of God Almighty, as suited to their supportment and consolation in their

Digitized by Google

wandering, helpless condition, before the promise was to be accomplished. But now, when God came to fulfil his promises, and to bring the people, by virtue of his covenant, into the land of Canaan, he reveals himself unto them by, and renews his covenant with them in, the name of Jehovah. And hereby did God declare that he came to give stability and accomplishment unto his promises; to which end they were now to live upon this name of Jehovah, in an expectation of the fulfilling of the promises, as their fathers did on that of God Almighty, in an expectation of protection from him in their wandering state and condition. Hence this name became the foundation of the Judaical church, and ground of the faith of them who did sincerely believe in God therein. And it is strangely fallen out, in the providence of God, that since the Jews have rejected the covenant of their fathers, and are cast out of the covenant for their unbelief, they have utterly forgot that name of God. No Jew in the world knows what it is, nor how to pronounce it or make mention of it. I know themselves and others pretend strange mysteries in the letters and vowels of that name, which make it ineffable; but the truth is, being cast out of that covenant which was built and established on that name, in the just judgment of God, through their own blindness and superstition, they are no more able to make mention of it or to take it into their mouths. It is required, then, that the name of God be given unto us as engaged in covenant, to secure our expectation that he will be unto us according to his name.

3. All the *whole gracious name of God*, every title that he hath given himself, every ascription of honour unto himself that he hath owned, is *confirmed* unto us (unto as many as believe) in Jesus Christ. For as he hath declared unto us the whole name of God, John xvii. 6, so not this or that promise of God, but all the promises of God are in him yea and amen. So that, as of old, every particular promise that God made unto the people served especially for the particular occasion on which it was given, and each name of God was to be rested on as to that dispensation whereunto it was suited to give relief and confidence,—as the name of El-shaddai to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the name Jehovah to Moses and the people; so now, by Jesus Christ, and in him, every particular promise belongs unto all believers in all their occasions, and every name of God whatever is theirs also, at all times, to rest upon and put their trust in. Thus, the particular promise made unto Joshua, at his entrance into Canaan, to encourage and strengthen him in that great enterprise of conquering the land, is by the apostle applied unto all believers in all their occasions whatever: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," Heb. xiii. 5. So likewise doth every name of God belong now unto us, as if it had in a particular manner been

Digitized by Google

engaged in covenant unto us, and that because the whole covenant is ratified and confirmed unto us by Jesus Christ, 2 Cor. vi. 18, vii. 1. This, then, absolutely secures unto us an interest in the name of God insisted on, the God of forgiveness, as if it had been given unto every one of us to assure us thereof.

4. God takes this name, "The God of forgiveness," *to be his in a peculiar manner*, as that whereby he will be distinguished and known. He appropriates it to himself, as expressing that which the power and goodness of no other can extend unto. "There are lords many, and gods many," saith the apostle, 1 Cor. viii. 5,—λεγόμενοι θεοί· some that are called so, such as some account so to be. How is the true God distinguished from these gods by reputation? He is so by this name; he is the God of pardons: Micah vii. 18, "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity?" This is his prerogative; herein none is equal to him, like him, or a sharer with him. "Who is a God like unto thee, that may be called a God of pardons?" The vanities of the nations cannot give them this rain; they have no refreshing showers of mercy and pardon in their power. Neither angels, nor saints, nor images, nor popes, can pardon sin. By this name doth he distinguish himself from them all.

5. To be known by this name *is the great glory of God in this world*. When Moses desired to see the glory of God, the Lord tells him that "he could not see his face," Exod. xxxiii. 18–20. The face of God, or the gracious majesty of his Being, his essential glory, is not to be seen of any in this life; we cannot see him as he is. But the glorious manifestation of himself we may behold and contemplate. This we may see as the back parts of God; that shadow of his excellencies which he casteth forth in the passing by us in his works and dispensations. This Moses shall see. And wherein did it consist? Why, in the revelation and declaration of this name of God: chap. xxxiv. 6, 7, "The LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." To be known by this name, to be honoured, feared, believed as that declares him, is the great glory of God. And shall this fail us? Can we be deceived trusting in it, or expecting that we shall find him to be what his name declares? God forbid.

Let us lay together these considerations, and we shall find that they will give us another stable foundation of the truth insisted on, and a great encouragement to poor sinful souls to draw nigh to God in Christ for pardon. God hath no name but what he gives unto himself; nor is it lawful to know him or call him otherwise. As he calls himself, so is he; what his name imports, so is his nature.

Digitized by Google

Every name also of God is engaged in Jesus Christ in the covenant, and is proposed unto us to place our trust and confidence in. Now, this is his name and his memorial, even "The God of forgiveness." By this he distinguisheth himself from all others, and expresseth it as the principal title of his honour, or his peculiar glory. According to this name, therefore, all that believe shall assuredly find "there is forgiveness with him."

XI. The consideration of the *essential properties of the nature of God*, and what is required to the manifestation of them, will afford us farther assurance hereof. Let us to this end take in the ensuing observations:—

First, God being *absolutely perfect and absolutely self-sufficient*, was eternally glorious, and satisfied with and in his own holy excellencies and perfections, before and without the creation of all or any thing by the putting forth or the exercise of his almighty power. The making, therefore, of all things depends on a mere sovereign act of the will and pleasure of God. So the whole creation makes its acknowledgment: Rev. iv. 11, v. 12, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." God could have omitted all this great work without the least impeachment of his glory. Not one holy property of his nature would have been diminished or abated in its eternal glory by that omission. This, then, depended on a pure act of his will and choice.

Secondly, On supposition that God would work "ad extra," by his power produce any thing *without himself*, it was absolutely necessary that *himself should be the end of his so doing*. For as before the production of all things, there was nothing that could be the end why any of them should be brought forth out of nothing, or towards which they should be disposed; so God, being an infinite agent in wisdom, and understanding, and power, he could have no end in his actings but that also which is infinite. It is therefore natural and necessary unto God to do all things for himself. It is impossible he should have any other end. And he hath done so accordingly: Prov. xvi. 4, "The LORD hath made all things for himself." He aimed at himself in all that he did; there being no other infinite good for him to make his object and his end but himself alone.

Thirdly, This doing things, *all things for himself*, cannot intend *an addition or accruement thereby of any new real good unto himself*. His absolute eternal perfection and all-sufficiency render this impossible. God doth not become more powerful, great, wise, just, holy, good, or gracious, by any of his works, by any thing that he doth. He can add nothing to himself. It must therefore be the manifestation and declaration of the holy properties of his nature

Digitized by Google

that he doth intend and design in his works. And there are two things required hereunto:—

1. That he *make them known;* that by ways suited to his infinite wisdom he both declare that such properties do belong unto him, as also what is the nature of them, according as the creature is able to apprehend.

So he doth things "to make his power known," to show his power, and to declare his name through the earth, Rom. ix. 17, 22. So it was said that by the works of creation, τὸ γνωστὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, "that which may be known of God is manifest," Rom. i. 19, 20. And what is that? Even the natural, essential properties of his being, "his eternal power and Godhead." To this head are referred all those promises of God that he would glorify himself, and the prayers of his saints that he would do so, and the attestations given unto it in the Scripture that he hath done so. He hath made known his wisdom, holiness, power, goodness, self-sufficiency, and the like perfections of his nature.

2. That he *attain an ascription*, an attribution of praise and glory to himself upon their account. His design is "to be admired in all them that believe," 2 Thess. i. 10;—that is, that upon an apprehension of his excellencies which he hath revealed, and as he hath revealed them, they should admire, adore, applaud, glorify, and praise him; worship, believe in, and trust him in all things; and endeavour the enjoyment of him as an eternal reward. And this is also threefold:—

(1.) *Interpretative.* So the inanimate and brute creatures ascribe unto God the glory of his properties, even by what they are and do. By what they are in their beings, and their observation of the law and inclination of their nature, they give unto God the glory of that wisdom and power whereby they are made, and of that sovereignty whereon they depend. Hence, nothing more frequent in the praises of God of old, than the calling of the inanimate creatures, heaven and earth, winds, storms, thunder, and the beasts of the field, to give praise and glory to God; that is, by what they are they do so, inasmuch as from the impression of God's glorious excellencies in their effects upon them, they are made known and manifest.

(2.) *Involuntary, in some rational creatures.* Sinning men and angels have no design, no will, no desire to give glory to God. They do their utmost endeavour to the contrary, to hate him, reproach and blaspheme him. But they cannot yet cast off the yoke of God. In their minds and consciences they are forced, and shall be for ever, to acknowledge that God is infinitely holy, infinitely wise, powerful, and righteous. And he hath the glory of all these properties from them in their very desires that he were otherwise. When they

Digitized by Google

would that God were not just to punish them, powerful to torment them, wise to find them out, holy to be displeased with their lusts and sins, they do at the same time, in the same thing, own, acknowledge, and give unto God the glory of his being, justice, wisdom, power, and holiness. When, therefore, God hath made known his properties, the ascription of glory unto him on their account is to rational creatures natural and unavoidable.

(3.) It is *voluntary, in the reasonable service,* worship, fear, trust, obedience of angels and men. God having revealed unto them the properties of his nature, they acknowledge, adore them, and place their confidence in them, and thereby glorify him as God. And this glorifying of God consisteth in three things:—

[1.] In making the excellencies of God revealed unto us the *principle and chief object of all the moral actings of our souls,* and of all the actings of our affections. To fear the Lord and his goodness, and to fear him for his goodness; to trust in his power and faithfulness; to obey his authority; to delight in his will and grace; to love him above all, because of his excellencies and beauty;—this is to glorify him.

[2.] To *pray for,* and *to rejoice in,* the ways and means whereby he will or hath promised farther to manifest or declare these properties of his nature and his glory in them. What is the reason why we pray for, long for, the accomplishment of the promises of God toward his saints, of his threatenings towards his enemies, of the fulfilling of the glorious works of his power and grace that yet remain to be done, of the coming of the kingdom of Christ, of the approach of glory? Is it not chiefly and principally that the glorious excellencies of God's nature may be made more manifest, be more known, more exalted,—that God may appear more as he is, and as he hath declared himself to be? This is to give glory to God. So likewise our joy, rejoicing, and satisfaction in any of the ways and works of God; it is solely on this account, that in them, God in his properties, —that is, his power, wisdom, holiness, and the like,—is revealed, declared, and made known.

[3.] In *their joint actual celebration of his praises;* which, as it is a duty of the greatest importance, and which we are, indeed, of all others most frequently exhorted unto and most earnestly called upon for; so in the nature of it, it consists in our believing, rejoicing expression of what God is and what he doth;—that is, our admiring, adoring, and blessing him, because of his holiness, goodness, and the rest of his properties, and his works of grace and power suitable unto them. This it is to praise God, Rev. v.

Fourthly, Observe that none of these properties of God can be thus manifested and known, nor himself be glorified for them, but

Digitized by Google

by his declaration of them, and by their effects. We know no more of God than he is pleased to reveal unto us. I mean not mere revelation by his word, but any ways or means, whether by his word, or by his works, or by impressions from the law of nature upon our hearts and minds. And whatever God thus declares of himself, he doth it by exercising, putting forth, and manifesting the effects of it. So we know his power, wisdom, goodness, and grace,—namely, by the effects of them, or the works of God that proceed from them and are suited unto them. And whatever is in God that is not thus made known, we cannot apprehend, nor glorify God on the account of it. God, therefore, doing all things, as hath been showed, for the glory of these his properties, he doth so reveal them and make them known.

Fifthly, Upon this design of God, it is necessary that he should reveal and make known *all* the attributes and properties of his nature, in works and effects peculiarly proceeding from them and answering unto them, that he might be glorified in them; and which, as the event manifests, he hath done accordingly. For what reason can be imagined why God will be glorified in one essential excellency of his nature and not in another? Especially must this be affirmed of those properties of the nature of God which the event manifesteth his principal glory to consist in and arise from, and the knowledge whereof is of the greatest use, behoof, and benefit unto the children of men, in reference unto his design towards them.

Sixthly, These things being so, let us consider how it stands in reference unto that which is under consideration. God, in the creation of all things, glorified or manifested his greatness, power, wisdom, and goodness, with many other properties of the like kind. But his sovereignty, righteousness, and holiness, how are they declared hereby? Either not at all, or not in so evident a manner as is necessary, that he might be fully glorified in them or for them. What, then, doth he do? leave them in darkness, vailed, undiscovered, satisfying himself in the glory of those properties which his work of creation had made known? Was there any reason why he should do so, designing to do all things for himself and for his own glory? Wherefore he gives his holy law as a rule of obedience unto men and angels. This plainly reveals his sovereignty or authority over them, his holiness and righteousness in the equity and purity of things he required of them: so that in and by these properties also he may be glorified. As he made all things for himself,—that is, the manifestation of his greatness, power, wisdom, and goodness; so he gave the law for himself,—that is, the manifestation of his authority, holiness, and righteousness. But is this all? Is there not *remunerative justice* in God, in a way of bounty? Is there not *vindic-*

Digitized by Google

tive justice in him, in a way of severity? There is so; and in the pursuit of the design mentioned they also are to be manifested, or God will not be glorified in them. This, therefore, he did also, in the rewards and punishments that he annexed unto the law of obedience that he had prescribed. To manifest his remunerative justice, he promised a reward in a way of bounty, which the angels that sinned not were made partakers of; and in the penalty threatened, which sinning angels and men incurred, he revealed his vindictive justice in a way of severity. So are all these properties of God made known by their effects, and so is God glorified in them or on their account.

But, after all this, are there no other properties of his nature, divine excellencies that cannot be separated from his being, which by none of these means are so much as once intimated to be in him? It is evident that there are; such are mercy, grace, patience, long-suffering, compassion, and the like. Concerning which observe,—

1. That where there are no *objects* of them, they cannot be declared, or manifested, or exercised. As God's power or wisdom could not be manifest if there were no objects of them, no more can his grace or mercy. If never any stand in need of them, they can never be exercised, and consequently never be known. Therefore were they not revealed, neither by the creation of all things, nor by the law or its sanction, nor by the law written in our hearts; for all these suppose no objects of grace and mercy. For it is sinners only, and such as have made themselves miserable by sin, that they can be exercised about.

2. There are no excellencies of God's nature that are *more expressive of divine goodness*, loveliness, and beauty than these are,—of mercy, grace, long-suffering, and patience; and, therefore, there is nothing that God so requireth our likeness unto him, in our conformity unto his image, as in these,—namely, mercy, grace, and readiness to forgive. And the contrary frame in any he doth of all things most abhor: "They shall have judgment without mercy, who shewed no mercy." And, therefore, it is certain that God will be glorified in the manifestation of these properties of his nature.

3. These properties can be no otherwise exercised, and consequently no otherwise known, but only in and by the *pardon of sin;* which puts it beyond all question that there is forgiveness with God. God will not lose the glory of these his excellencies: he will be revealed in them, he will be known by them, he will be glorified for them; which he could not be if there were not forgiveness with him. So that here comes in not only the truth but the necessity of forgiveness also.

Digitized by Google

Forgiveness manifested in the sending of the Son of God to die for sin—And from the obligation that is on us to forgive one another.

XII. In the next place we shall proceed unto that evidence which is the *centre* wherein all the lines of those foregoing do meet and rest,—the *fountain* of all those streams of refreshment that are in them,—that which animates and gives life and efficacy unto them. This lies in *God's sending of his Son.* The consideration hereof will leave no pretence or excuse unto unbelief in this matter.

To make this evidence more clear and legible, as to what is intended in it, we must consider,—First, What was the *rise* of this sending we speak of. Secondly, *Who* it was that was sent. Thirdly, *How*, or in what manner he was sent. Fourthly, Unto what *end* and purpose.

First, The *rise* and spring of it is to be considered. It came forth from the eternal mutual consent and counsel of the Father and the Son: Zech. vi. 13, "The counsel of peace shall be between them both." It is of Christ, the Branch, of whom he speaks. "He shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both;"—that is, between God the Father, who sends him, and himself. There lay the counsel of peace-making between God and man, in due time accomplished by him who is "our peace," Eph. ii. 14: so he speaks, Prov. viii. 30, 31, "Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men." They are the words of the Wisdom,—that is, of the Son of God. When was this done? "Then I was by him." Why, "before the mountains were settled, while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields;" that is, before the creation of the world, or from eternity, verses 25, 26. But how then could he "rejoice in the habitable part of the earth?" and how could his "delights be with the sons of men," seeing as yet they were not? I answer, It was the counsel of peace towards them before mentioned, in the pursuit whereof he was to be sent to converse amongst them on the earth. He rejoiced in the fore-thoughts of his being sent to them, and the work he had to do for them. Then, with his own consent and delight, was he "fore-ordained" unto his work, even "before the foundation of the world," 1 Pet. i. 20, and received of the Father "the promise of eternal life, even before the world began," Tit. i. 2; that is, to be given unto sinners by way of forgiveness through his blood.

Digitized by Google

So is this whole counsel expressed, Ps. xl. 7, 8,—whence it is made use of by the apostle, Heb. x. 5–7,—"Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God. Thy law is in the midst of my heart." There is the will of the Father in this matter, and the law of its performance; and there is the will of the Son in answer thereunto, and his delight in fulfilling that law which was prescribed unto him.

Let us now consider to what purpose was this eternal counsel of peace, this agreement of the Father and Son from eternity, about the state and condition of mankind. If God would have left them all to perish under the guilt of their sins, there had been no need at all of any such thoughts, design, or counsel. God had given unto them a law righteous and holy, which if they transgressed, he had threatened them with eternal destruction. Under the rule, disposal, and power of this law, he might have righteously left them to stand or fall, according to the verdict and sentence thereof. But now he assures us, he reveals unto us, that he had other thoughts in this matter; that there were other counsels between the Father and the Son concerning us; and these such as the Son was delighted in the prospect of his accomplishment of them. What can these thoughts and counsels be, but about a way for their deliverance? which could no otherwise be but by the forgiveness of sins; for whatever else be done, yet if God mark iniquities, there is none can stand. Hearken, therefore, poor sinner, and have hope. God is consulting about thy deliverance and freedom. And what cannot the wisdom and grace of the Father and Son effect and accomplish? And to this end was the Son sent into the world; which is the second thing proposed to consideration.

Secondly, *Whom did God send about this business?* The Scripture lays great weight and emphasis on this consideration, faith must do so also: John iii. 16, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son;" so, 1 John iv. 9, "In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." And again, verse 10, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." And who is this that is thus sent, and called the only-begotten Son of God? Take a double description of him, one out of the Old Testament and another from the New;—the first from Isa. ix. 6, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace;" the other from Heb. i. 2, 3, "God hath spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who

Digitized by Google

being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." This is he who was sent. In *nature* he was glorious, even "over all, God blessed for ever;"—in *answerableness* unto the Father, "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person," possessed of all the same essential properties with him, so that what we find in him we may be assured of in the Father also; for he that hath seen him hath seen the Father, who is in him;—in *power* omnipotent, for he made all things, and "upholding all things," with an unspeakable facility, "by the word of his power;"—in *office* exalted over all, sitting "on the right hand of the Majesty on high;"—in *name*, "The mighty God, The everlasting Father:" so that whatever he came about he will assuredly accomplish and fulfil; for what should hinder or let this mighty one from perfecting his design?

Now, this consideration raiseth our evidence to that height as to give an unquestionable assurance in this matter. Here is a near and a particular object for faith to be exercised about and to rest in. Wherefore did this glorious Son of God come and tabernacle amongst poor sinners? "We beheld the glory of the eternal Word, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, and he was made flesh (*καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν*), and pitched his tabernacle amongst us," John i. 14. To what end? It was no other but to work out and accomplish the eternal counsel of peace towards sinners before mentioned; to procure for them, and to declare unto them, the forgiveness of sin. And what greater evidence, what greater assurance can we have, that there is forgiveness with God for us? He himself hath given it as a rule, that what is done by giving an only-begotten or an only-beloved son gives assured testimony of reality and sincerity in the thing that is confirmed by it. So he says unto Abraham, Gen. xxii. 12, "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." This way it may be known, or no way. And they are blessed conclusions that faith may make from this consideration: "Now I know that there is forgiveness with God, seeing he hath not withheld his Son, his only Son, that he might accomplish it." To this purpose the apostle teacheth us to reason, Rom. viii. 32, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

What farther can any soul desire? what ground remains for unbelief to stand upon in this matter? Is there any thing more to be done herein? It was to manifest that there is forgiveness with him, and to make way for the exercise of it, that God sent his Son, that the Son of God came into the world, as will afterwards more fully appear.

Digitized by Google

Thirdly, To this sending of the Son of God to this purpose, there is evidence and security added from the *manner wherein he was sent.* How was this? Not in glory, not in power,—not in an open discovery of his eternal power and Godhead. Had it been so, we might have thought that he had come merely to manifest and glorify himself in the world; and this he might have done without thoughts of mercy or pardon towards us. But he came quite in another manner: he was seen in the "likeness of sinful flesh," Rom. viii. 3; in "the form of a servant," Phil. ii. 7; being "made of a woman, made under the law," Gal. iv. 4. What he endured, suffered, underwent in that state and condition, is in some measure known unto us all. All this could not be merely and firstly for himself. All that he expected at the close of it was, to be "glorified with that glory which he had with the Father before the world was," John xvii. 5. It must, then, be for our sakes. And for what? To save and deliver us from that condition of wrath at present, and future expectation of vengeance, which we had cast ourselves into by sin; that is, to procure for us the forgiveness of sin. Had not God designed pardon for sin, he would never have sent his Son in this manner to testify it; and he did it because it could no other way be brought about, as hath been declared. Do we doubt whether there be forgiveness with God or no? or whether we shall obtain it if we address ourselves unto him for to be made partakers of it? Consider the condition of his Son in the world,—review his afflictions, poverty, temptation, sorrows, sufferings,—then ask our souls, "To what end was all this?" And if we can find any other design in it, any other reason, cause, or necessity of it, but only and merely to testify and declare that there is forgiveness with God, and to purchase and procure the communication of it unto us, let us abide in and perish under our fears. But if this be so, we have sufficient warranty to assure our souls in the expectation of it.

Fourthly, Besides all this, there ensues upon what went before, that great and wonderful issue *in the death of the Son of God.* This thing was great and marvellous, and we may a little inquire into what it was that was designed therein. And hereof the Scripture gives us a full account; as,—

1. That he died to make *atonement for sin,* or "reconciliation for iniquity," Dan. ix. 24. He "gave his life a ransom for the sins of many," Matt. xx. 28; 1 Tim. ii. 6. He was in it "made sin," that others "might be made the righteousness of God in him," 2 Cor. v. 21; Rom. viii. 3. Therein he "bare our sins in his own body on the tree," 1 Pet. ii. 24. This was the state of this matter:—Notwithstanding all the love, grace, and condescension before mentioned, yet our sins were of that nature, and so directly opposite unto the justice and

Digitized by Google

holiness of God, that unless atonement were made and a price of redemption paid, there could be no pardon, no forgiveness obtained. This, therefore, he undertook to do, and that by the sacrifice of himself; answering all that was prefigured by and represented in the sacrifices of old, as the apostle largely declares, Heb. x. 5–10. And herein is the forgiveness that is in God copied out and exemplified so clearly and evidently, that he that cannot read it will be cursed unto eternity. Yea, and let him be accursed; for what can be more required to justify God in his eternal destruction? He that will not believe his grace, as testified and exemplified in the blood of his Son, let him perish without remedy. Yea, but,—

2. *The curse and sentence of the law* lies on record against sinners. It puts in its demands against our acquittance, and lays an obligation upon us unto punishment: and God will not reject nor destroy his law; unless it be answered, there is no acceptance for sinners. This, therefore, in the next place, his death was designed unto. As he satisfied and made atonement by it unto justice (that was the fountain, spring, and cause of the law), so he fulfilled and answered the demands of the law as it was an effect of the justice of God: so Rom. viii. 1–4. He suffered "in the likeness of sinful flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled" and answered. He answered "the curse of the law" when he was "made a curse for us," Gal. iii. 13; and so became, as to the obedience of the law, "the end of the law for righteousness unto them that do believe," Rom. x. 3, 4. And as to the penalty that it threatened, he bore it, removed it, and took it out of the way. So hath he made way for forgiveness through the very heart of the law; it hath not one word to speak against the pardon of them that do believe. But,—

3. Sinners are under *the power of Satan*. He lays a claim unto them; and by what means shall they be rescued from his interest and dominion? This also his death was designed to accomplish: for as he was "manifested to destroy the works of the devil," 1 John iii. 8, so "through death he destroyed him that had the power of death," Heb. ii. 14;—that is, to despoil him of his power, to destroy his dominion, to take away his plea unto sinners that believe; as we have at large elsewhere declared.

And by all these things, with many other concernments of his death that might be instanced in, we are abundantly secured of the forgiveness that is with God, and of his willingness that we should be made partakers thereof.

Fifthly, Is this all? Did his work cease in his death? Did he no more for the securing of the forgiveness of sins unto us, but only that he died for them? Yes; *he lives also after death, for the same end and purpose*. This Son of God, in that nature which he assumed to

Digitized by Google

expiate sin by death, lives again after death, to secure unto us and to complete the forgiveness of sins. And this he doth two ways:—

1. Being raised from that death which he underwent, to make atonement for sin, by the power and good will of God, he evidenceth and testifieth unto us that he hath fully performed the work he undertook, and that in our behalf, and for us, he hath received a *discharge*. Had he not answered the guilt of sin by his death, he had never been raised from it.

2. He lives after death a *mediatory life*, to make intercession for us, that we may receive the forgiveness of sin, as also himself to give it out unto us; which things are frequently made use of to encourage the souls of men to believe, and therefore shall not at present be farther insisted on.

Thus, then, stands this matter:—That mercy might have a way to exercise itself in forgiveness, with a consistency unto the honour of the righteousness and law of God, was the Son of God so sent, for the ends and purposes mentioned. Now, herein consisteth *the greatest work* that God did ever perform, or ever will. It was the most eminent product of infinite wisdom, goodness, grace, and power; and herein do all the excellencies of God shine forth more gloriously than in all the works of his hands. Let us, then, wisely ponder and consider this matter; let us bring our own souls, with their objections, unto this evidence, and see what exception we have to lay against it. I know nothing will satisfy unbelief. The design of it is, to make the soul find that to be so hereafter which it would persuade it of here,—namely, that there is no forgiveness in God. And Satan, who makes use of this engine, knows full well that there is none for them who believe there is none, or rather will not believe that there is any; for it will, at the last day, be unto men according unto their faith or unbelief. He that believeth aright, and he that believeth not that forgiveness is with God, as to their own particulars, shall neither of them be deceived. But what is it that can be reasonably excepted against this evidence, this foundation of our faith in this matter? God hath not sent his Son in vain; which yet he must have done, as we have showed, had he not designed to manifest and exercise forgiveness towards sinners. Wherefore, to confirm our faith from hence, let us make a little search into these things in some particular inquiries:—

1. Seeing the Son of God *died* in that way and manner that he did, according to the determinate counsel and will of God, wherefore did he do so, and what aimed he at therein?

Ans. It is plain that he died for our sins, Rom iv. 25; that is, "to make reconciliation for the sins of the people," Heb. ii. 17, 18. This Moses and the prophets, this the whole Scripture, testifieth

Digitized by Google

unto. And without a supposal of it, not one word of it can be aright believed; nor can we yield any due obedience unto God without it.

2. What, then, did God do unto him? What was in transaction between God as the Judge of all, and him that was the Mediator of the church?

Ans. God indeed "laid on him the iniquity of us all," Isa. liii. 6,—all the sins of all the elect; yea, he made him "a curse for us," Gal. iii. 13; and making him a "sin-offering," or "an offering for sin," he "condemned sin in the flesh," Rom. viii. 3, 2 Cor. v. 21: so that all that which the justice or law of God had to require about the punishment due unto sin was all laid and executed on him.

3. What, then, did Christ do in his death? What did he aim at and design? what was his intention in submitting unto and undergoing the will of God in these things?

Ans. "He bare our sins in his own body on the tree," 1 Pet. ii. 24; "he took our sins upon him," undertook to answer for them, to pay our debts, to make an end of the difference about them between God and sinners, Dan. ix. 24. His aim undoubtedly was, by all that he underwent and suffered, so to make atonement for sin as that no more could on that account be expected.

4. Had God any more to require of sinners on the account of sin, that his justice might be satisfied, his holiness vindicated, his glory exalted, his honour be repaired, than what he charged on Christ? Did he *lay somewhat of the penalty* due to sin on *him*, execute some part of the curse of the law against him, and yet *reserve some wrath for sinners themselves?*

Ans. No, doubtless. He came *to do the whole will of God*, Heb. x. 7, 9; and God spared him not any thing that in his holy will he had appointed to be done unto sin, Rom. viii. 32. He would never have so dealt with his Son, to have made a half-work of it; nor is the work of making satisfaction for sin such as that any, the least part of it, should ever be undertaken by another. Nothing is more injurious or blasphemous against God and Christ than the foolish imagination among the Papists of works satisfactory for the punishment due to sin or any part of it; as also is their purgatory pains to expiate any remaining guilt after this life. This work of making satisfaction for sin is such as no creature in heaven or earth can put forth a hand unto. It was wholly committed to the Son of God, who alone was able to undertake it, and who hath perfectly accomplished it; so that God now says, "'Fury is not in me.' He that will lay hold on my strength that he may have peace, he shall have peace," Isa. xxvii. 4, 5.

5. What, then, became of the Lord Christ in his undertaking? Did he go through with it? or did he faint under it? Did he only

Digitized by Google

testify his love, and show his good will for our deliverance? or did he also effectually pursue it, and not faint, until he had made a way for the exercise of forgiveness?

Ans. It was not possible that he should be detained by "the pains of death," Acts ii. 24. He knew beforehand that he should be carried through his work, that he should not be forsaken in it, nor faint under it, Isa. l. 5–9. And God hath given this unquestionable evidence of his discharge of the debt of sin to the utmost, in that he was acquitted from the whole account when he was raised from the dead; for he that is given up to prison, upon the sentence of the law, for the debt of sin, shall not be freed until he have paid the utmost farthing. This, therefore, he manifested himself to have done, by his resurrection from the dead.

6. What, then, is now become of him? where is he, and what doth he? Hath he so done his work and laid it aside, or doth he still continue to carry it on until it be brought unto its perfection?

Ans. It is true, he was dead, but he is alive, and lives for ever; and hath told us that "because he liveth we shall live also," and that because this is the end of his mediatory life in heaven: "He ever liveth to make intercession for us," Heb. vii. 25–27; and to this end, that the forgiveness of sin, which he hath procured for us, may be communicated unto us, that we might be partakers of it, and live for ever.

What ground is left of questioning the truth in hand? What link of this chain can unbelief break in or upon? If men resolve, notwithstanding all this evidence and assurance that is tendered unto them thereof, that they will not yet believe that there is forgiveness with God, or will not be encouraged to attempt the securing of it unto themselves, or also despise it as a thing not worth the looking after; it is enough for them that declare it, that preach these things, that they are a sweet savour unto God in them that perish as well as in them that are saved. And I bless God that I have had this opportunity to bear testimony to the grace of God in Christ; which if it be not received, it is because "the god of this world hath blinded the eyes of men, that the light of the gospel of the glory of God should not shine into their minds." But Christ will be glorified in them that believe on these principles and foundations.

XIII. Another evidence of the same truth may be taken from hence, that God requires forgiveness in us, that we should forgive one another; and therefore, doubtless, there is forgiveness with him for us. The sense of this consideration unto our present purpose will be manifest in the ensuing observations:—

First, It is certain that God hath required this of us. The testimonies hereof are many and known, so that they need not particularly

Digitized by Google

to be repeated or insisted on: see Luke xvii. 3, 4; Eph. iv. 32; Matt. xviii. 23, unto the end. Only, there are some things that put a singular emphasis upon this command, manifesting the great importance of this duty in us, which may be marked; as,—

1. That our Saviour requires us to carry a sense of our integrity and sincerity in the discharge of this duty along with us in our addresses unto God in prayer. Hence, he teacheth and enjoins us to pray or plead for the forgiveness of our debts to God (that is, our sins or trespasses against him, which make us debtors to his law and justice), even "as we forgive them that so trespass against us" as to stand in need of our forgiveness, Matt. vi. 12. Many are ready to devour such as are not satisfied that the words of that rule of prayer which he hath prescribed unto us are to be precisely read or repeated every day. I wish they would as heedfully mind that prescription which is given us herein for that frame of heart and spirit which ought to be in all our supplications; it might possibly abate of their wrath in that and other things. But here is a rule for all prayer, as all acknowledge; as also of the things that are requisite to make it acceptable. This, in particular, is required, that before the Searcher of all hearts, and in our addresses unto him, in our greatest concernments, we profess our sincerity in the discharge of this duty, and do put our obtaining of what we desire upon that issue. This is a great crown that is put upon the head of this duty, that which makes it very eminent, and evidenceth the great concern of the glory of God and our own souls therein.

2. We may observe, that no other duty whatever is expressly placed in the same series, order, or rank with it; which makes it evident that it is singled out to be professed as a token and pledge of our sincerity in all other parts of our obedience unto God. It is by Christ himself made the instance for the trial of our sincerity in our *universal obedience;* which gives no small honour unto it. The apostle puts great weight on the fifth commandment, "Honour thy father and mother;" because it "is the first commandment with promise," Eph. vi. 2. All the commandments, indeed, had a promise, "Do this, and live,"—life was promised to the observance of them all; but this is the first that had a peculiar promise annexed unto it, and accompanying of it. And it was such a promise as had a peculiar foundation through God's ordinance in the thing itself. It is, that the parents should prolong the lives of their children that were obedient. יַאֲרִכֻן יָמִיךָ, Exod. xx. 12,—"They shall prolong thy days;" that is, by praying for their prosperity, blessing them in the name of God, and directing them in those ways of obedience whereby they might live and possess the land. And this promise is now translated from the covenant of Canaan into the covenant of grace; the

Digitized by Google

blessing of parents going far towards the interesting their children in the promise thereof, and so prolonging their days unto eternity, though their days in this world should be of little continuance. So it is said of our Saviour that "he should see his seed, and prolong his days," Isa. liii. 10; which hath carried over that word, and that which is signified by it, unto eternal things. But this by the way. As the singular promise made to that command renders it singular, so doth this especial instancing in this duty in our prayer render it also; for though, as all the commandments had a promise, so we are to carry a testimony with us of our sincerity in universal obedience in our addresses unto God, yet the singling out of this instance renders it exceeding remarkable, and shows what a value God puts upon it, and how well he is pleased with it.

3. That God requires this forgiveness in us *upon the account of the forgiveness we receive from him;* which is to put the greatest obligation upon us unto it that we are capable of, and to give the strongest and most powerful motive possible unto its performance. See Eph. iv. 32.

4. That this duty is more directly and expressly required in the *New Testament* than in the Old. Required then it was, but not so openly, so plainly, so expressly as now. Hence we find a different frame of spirit between them under that dispensation and those under that of the New Testament. There are found amongst them some such reflections upon their enemies, their oppressors, persecutors, and the like, as although they were warranted by some actings of the Spirit of God in them, yet, being suited unto the dispensation they were under, do no way become us now, who, by Jesus Christ, receive "grace for grace." So Zechariah, when he died, cried, "The LORD look upon, and require;" but Stephen, dying in the same cause and manner, said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Elijah called for fire from heaven; but our Saviour reproves the least inclination in his disciples to imitate him therein. And the reason of this difference is, because forgiveness in God is under the New Testament far more clearly (especially in the nature and cause of it) discovered in the gospel, which hath brought life and immortality to light, than it was under the law; for all our obedience, both in matter and manner, is to be suited unto the discoveries and revelation of God unto us.

5. This forgiveness of others is made an express condition of *our obtaining pardon and forgiveness from God,* Matt. vi. 14, 15; and the nature hereof is expressly declared, chap. xviii. 23–35. Such evangelical conditions we have not many. I confess they have no *causal influence* into the accomplishment of the promise; but the non-performance of them is a sufficient bar against our pretending

Digitized by Google

to the promise, a sufficient evidence that we have no pleadable interest in it. Our forgiving of others will not procure forgiveness for ourselves; but our not forgiving of others proves that we ourselves are not forgiven. And all these things do show what weight God himself lays on this duty.

Secondly, Observe that this duty is such as that there is *nothing more comely, useful, or honourable unto, or praiseworthy in, any, than a due performance of it.* To be morose, implacable, inexorable, revengeful, is one of the greatest degeneracies of human nature. And no men are commonly, even in this world, more branded with real infamy and dishonour, amongst wise and good men, than those who are of such a frame, and do act accordingly. To remember injuries, to retain a sense of wrongs, to watch for opportunities of revenge, to hate and be maliciously perverse, is to represent the image of the devil unto the world in its proper colours; he is the great enemy and self-avenger. On the other side, no grace, no virtue, no duty, no ornament of the mind or conversation of man, is in itself so lovely, so comely, so praiseworthy, or so useful unto mankind, as are meekness, readiness to forgive, and pardon. This is that principally which renders a man a good man, for whom one would even dare to die. And I am sorry to add that this grace or duty is recommended by its rarity. It is little found amongst the children of men. The consideration of the defect of men herein, as in those other fundamental duties of the gospel,—in self-denial, readiness for the cross, and forsaking the world,—is an evidence, if not of how little sincerity there is in the world, yet at least it is of how little growing and thriving there is amongst professors.

Thirdly, That *there is no grace, virtue, or perfection in any man, but what is as an emanation from the divine goodness and bounty, so expressive of some divine excellencies or perfection,*—somewhat that is in God, in a way and manner infinitely more excellent. We were created in the image of God. Whatever was good or comely in us was a part of that image; especially the ornaments of our minds, the perfections of our souls. These things had in them a resemblance of, and a correspondency unto, some excellencies in God, whereunto, by the way of analogy, they may be reduced. This being, for the most part, lost by sin, a shadow of it only remaining in the faculties of our souls and that dominion over the creatures which is permitted unto men in the patience of God, the recovery that we have by grace is nothing but an initial renovation of the image of God in us, Eph. iv. 24. It is the implanting upon our natures those graces which may render us again like unto him. And nothing is grace or virtue but what so answers to somewhat in

Digitized by Google

God. So, then, whatever is in us of this kind is in God absolutely, perfectly, in a way and manner infinitely more excellent.

Let us now, therefore, put these things together:—God requires of us that there should be forgiveness in us for those that do offend us, forgiveness without limitation and bounds. The grace hereof he bestoweth on his saints, sets a high price upon it, and manifests many ways that he accounts it among the most excellent of our endowments, one of the most lovely and praiseworthy qualifications of any person. What, then, shall we now say? Is there forgiveness with him or no? "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?" He that thus prescribes forgiveness to us, that bestows the grace of it upon us, is there not forgiveness with him? It is all one as to say, "Though we are good, yet God is not; though we are benign and bountiful, yet he is not." He that finds this grace wrought in him in any measure, and yet fears that he shall not find it in God for himself, doth therein and so far prefer himself above God; which is the natural effect of cursed unbelief.

But the truth is, were there not forgiveness with God, forgiveness in man would be no virtue, with all those qualities that incline thereto,—such are meekness, pity, patience, compassion, and the like; which what were it but to set loose human nature to rage and madness? For as every truth consists in its answerableness to the prime and eternal Verity, so virtue consists not absolutely nor primarily in a conformity to a rule of command, but in a correspondency unto the first absolute perfect Being and its perfections.

Properties of forgiveness—The greatness and freedom of it.

THE arguments and demonstrations foregoing have, we hope, undeniably evinced the great truth we have insisted on; which is the life and soul of all our hope, profession, religion, and worship. The end of all this discourse is to lay a firm foundation for faith to rest upon in its addresses unto God for the forgiveness of sins, as also to give encouragements unto all sorts of persons so to do. This end remains now to be explained and pressed; which work yet before we directly close withal, two things are farther to be premised. And the *first* is, to propose some of those *adjuncts* of, and *considerations* about, this forgiveness, as may both encourage and necessitate us to seek out after it; and to mix the testimonies given unto it and the promises of it with faith, unto our benefit and advantage.

Digitized by Google

The *other* is, to show how needful all this endeavour is, upon the account of that great unbelief which is in the most in this matter. As to the first of these, then, we may consider,—

First, That this forgiveness that is with God *is such as becomes him;* such as is suitable to his greatness, goodness, and all other excellencies of his nature; such as that therein he will be known to be God. What he says concerning some of the works of his providence, "Be still, and know that I am God," may be much more said concerning this great effect of his grace. Still your souls, and know that he is God. It is not like that narrow, difficult, halving, and manacled forgiveness that is found amongst men, when any such thing is found amongst them; but it is full, free, boundless, bottomless, absolute, such as becomes his nature and excellencies. It is, in a word, forgiveness that is with God, and by the exercise whereof he will be known so to be. And hence,—

1. *God himself doth really separate and distinguish his forgiveness from any thing that our thoughts and imaginations can reach unto;* and that because it is his, and like himself. It is an object for faith alone, which can rest in that which it cannot comprehend. It is never safer than when it is, as it were, overwhelmed with infiniteness. But set mere rational thoughts or the imaginations of our minds at work about such things, and they fall inconceivably short of them. They can neither conceive of them aright nor use them unto their proper end and purpose. Were not forgiveness in God somewhat beyond what men could imagine, no flesh could be saved. This himself expresseth: Isa. lv. 7–9, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." They are, as is plain in the context, thoughts of forgiveness and ways of pardon whereof he speaks. These our apprehensions come short of; we know little or nothing of the infinite largeness of his heart in this matter. He that he speaks of is רָשָׁע, "an impiously wicked man," and אִישׁ אָוֶן, "a man of deceit and perverse wickedness;" he whose design and course is nothing but a lie, sin, and iniquity; such a one as we would have little or no hopes of,—that we would scarce think it worth our while to deal withal about,—a hopeless conversion; or can scarce find in our hearts to pray for him, but are ready to give him up as one profligate and desperate. But let him turn to the Lord, and he shall obtain forgiveness. But how can this be? is it possible there should be mercy for such a one? Yes; for the Lord

Digitized by Google

יַרְבֶּה לִסְלוֹחַ, "will multiply to pardon." He hath forgiveness with him to outdo all the multiplied sins of any that turn unto him and seek for it. But this is very hard, very difficult for us to apprehend. This is not the way and manner of men. We deal not thus with profligate offenders against us. "True," saith God; "but 'your ways are not my ways.' I do not act in this matter like unto you, nor as you are accustomed to do." How then shall we apprehend it? how shall we conceive of it? "You can never do it by your reason or imaginations; 'for as the heavens are above the earth, so are my thoughts,' in this matter, 'above your thoughts.'" This is an expression to set out the largest and most inconceivable distance that may be. The creation will afford no more significant expression or representation of it. The heavens are inconceivably distant from the earth, and inconceivably glorious above it. So are the thoughts of God: they are not only distant from ours, but have a glory in them also that we cannot rise up unto. For the most part, when we come to deal with God about forgiveness, we hang in every brier of disputing, quarrelsome unbelief. This or that circumstance or aggravation, this or that unparalleled particular, bereaves us of our confidence. Want of a due consideration of him with whom we have to do, measuring him by that *line of our own imaginations*, bringing him down unto *our thoughts* and *our ways*, is the cause of all our disquietments. Because we find it hard to forgive our pence, we think he cannot forgive talents. But he hath provided to obviate such thoughts in us: Hos. xi. 9, "I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I AM GOD, AND NOT MAN." Our satisfaction in this matter is to be taken from his nature. Were he a man, or as the sons of men, it were impossible that, upon such and so many provocations, he should turn away from the fierceness of his anger. But he is God. This gives an infiniteness and an inconceivable boundlessness to the forgiveness that is with him, and exalts it above all our thoughts and ways. This is to be lamented,—presumption, which turns God into an idol, ascribes unto that idol a greater largeness in forgiveness than faith is able to rise up unto when it deals with him as a God of infinite excellencies and perfections. The reasons of it, I confess, are obvious. But this is certain, no presumption can falsely imagine that forgiveness to itself from the idol of its heart, as faith may in the way of God find in him and obtain from him; for,—

2. God engageth his *infinite excellencies* to demonstrate the greatness and *boundlessness* of his forgiveness. He proposeth them unto our consideration to convince us that we shall find pardon with him suitable and answerable unto them. See Isa. xl. 27–31, "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid

Digitized by Google

from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." The matter in question is, whether acceptance with God, which is only by forgiveness, is to be obtained or no. This, sinful Jacob either despairs of, or at least desponds about. But saith God, "My thoughts are not as your thoughts" in this matter. And what course doth he take to convince them of their mistake therein? what argument doth he make use of to free them from their unbelief, and to rebuke their fears? Plainly, he calls them to the consideration of himself, both who and what he is with whom they had to do, that they might expect acceptance and forgiveness such as did become him. Minding them of his power, his immensity, his infinite wisdom, his unchangeableness, all the excellencies and properties of his nature, he demands of them whether they have not just ground to expect forgiveness and grace above all their thoughts and apprehensions, because answering the infinite largeness of his heart, from whence it doth proceed.

And Moses manageth this plea for the forgiveness of that people under a high provocation, and a most severe threatening of their destruction thereon, Numb. xiv. 17, 18. He pleads for pardon in such a way and manner as may answer the great and glorious properties of the nature of God, and which would manifest an infiniteness of power and all-sufficiency to be in him.

This, I say, is an encouragement in general unto believers. We have, as I hope, upon unquestionable grounds, evinced that there is forgiveness with God; which is the hinge on which turneth the issue of our eternal condition. Now this is *like himself;* such as becomes him; that answers the infinite perfections of his nature; that is exercised and given forth by him as God. We are apt to narrow and straiten it by our unbelief, and to render it unbecoming of him. He less dishonours God (or as little), who, being wholly under the power of the law, believes that there is no forgiveness with him, none to be obtained from him, or doth not believe it that so it is, or is so to be obtained,—for which he hath the voice and sentence of the law to countenance him,—than those who, being convinced of the principles and grounds of it before mentioned, and of the truth of the testimony given unto it, do yet, by straitening and narrowing

Digitized by Google

of it, render it unworthy of him whose excellencies are all infinite, and whose ways on that account are incomprehensible. If, then, we resolve to treat with God about this matter (which is the business now in hand), let us do it as it becomes his greatness; that is, indeed, as the wants of our souls do require. Let us not entangle our own spirits by limiting his grace. The father of the child possessed with a devil, being in a great agony when he came to our Saviour, cries out, "If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us," Mark ix. 22. He would fain be delivered, but the matter was so great that he questioned whether the Lord Christ had either compassion or power enough for his relief. And what did he obtain hereby? Nothing but the retarding of the cure of his child for a season; for our Saviour holds him off until he had instructed him in this matter. Saith he, verse 23, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth;"—"Mistake not; if thy child be not cured, it is not for want of power or pity in me, but of faith in thee. My power is such as renders all things possible, so that they be believed." So it is with many who would desirously be made partakers of forgiveness. If it be possible, they would be pardoned; but they do not see it possible. Why, where is the defect? God hath no pardon for them, or such as they are; and so it may be they come finally short of pardon. What! because God *cannot pardon them?*—it is not possible with him? Not at all; but because they cannot, they will not believe, that the forgiveness that is with him is such as that it would answer all the wants of their souls, because it answers the infinite largeness of his heart. And if this doth not wholly deprive them of pardon, yet it greatly retards their peace and comfort. God doth not take it well to be limited by us in any thing, least of all in his grace. This he calls a tempting of him, a provoking temptation: Ps. lxxviii. 41, "They turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel." This he could not bear with. If there be any pardon with God, it is such as becomes him to give. When he pardons, he will "abundantly pardon." Go with your half-forgiveness, limited, conditional pardons, with reserves and limitations, unto the sons of men; it may be it may become them, it is like themselves;—that of God is absolute and perfect, before which our sins are as a cloud before the east wind and the rising sun. Hence he is said to do this work with his whole heart and his whole soul, χαρίζεσθαι, "freely," bountifully, largely to indulge and forgive unto us our sins, and "to cast them into the depths of the sea," Micah vii. 19, into a bottomless ocean, —an emblem of infinite mercy. Remember this, poor souls, when you are to deal with God in this matter: "All things are possible unto them that do believe."

Digitized by Google

Secondly, This forgiveness is in or with God, not only so as that we may apply ourselves unto it if we will, for which he will not be offended with us, but so also as that *he hath placed his great glory in the declaration and communication of it;* nor can we honour him more than by coming to him to be made partakers of it, and so to receive it from him. For the most part, we are, as it were, ready rather to steal forgiveness from God, than to receive from him as one that gives it freely and largely. We take it up and lay it down as though we would be glad to have it, so God did not, as it were, see us take it; for we are afraid he is not willing we should have it indeed. We would steal this fire from heaven, and have a share in God's treasures and riches almost without his consent: at least, we think that we have it from him "ægrè," with much difficulty; that it is rarely given, and scarcely obtained; that he gives it out ἐκὼν ἀέκοντί γε θύμῳ, with a kind of *unwilling willingness,*— as we sometimes give alms without cheerfulness; and that he loseth so much by us as he giveth out in pardon. We are apt to think that we are very willing to have forgiveness, but that God is unwilling to bestow it, and that because he seems to be a loser by it, and to forego the glory of inflicting punishment for our sins; which of all things we suppose he is most loath to part withal. And this is the very nature of unbelief. But indeed things are quite otherwise. He hath in this matter, through the Lord Christ, ordered all things in his dealings with sinners, "to the praise of the glory of his grace," Eph. i. 6. His design in the whole mystery of the gospel is to make his grace glorious, or to exalt pardoning mercy. The great fruit and product of his grace is forgiveness of sinners. This God will render himself glorious in and by. All the praise, glory, and worship that he designs from any in this world is to redound unto him by the way of this grace, as we have proved at large before. For this cause spared he the world when sin first entered into it; for this cause did he provide a new covenant when the old was become unprofitable; for this cause did he send his Son into the world. This hath he testified by all the evidences insisted on. Would he have lost the praise of his grace, nothing hereof would have been done or brought about.

We can, then, no way so eminently bring or ascribe glory unto God as by our receiving forgiveness from him, he being willing thereunto upon the account of its tendency unto his own glory, in that way which he hath peculiarly fixed on for its manifestation. Hence the apostle exhorts us to "come boldly unto the throne of grace," Heb. iv. 16; that is, with the confidence of faith, as he expounds "boldness," chap. x. 19–22. We come about a business wherewith he is well pleased; such as he delights in the doing of,

Digitized by Google

as he expresseth himself, Zeph. iii. 17, "The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." This is the way of God's pardoning; he doth it in a rejoicing, triumphant manner, satisfying abundantly his own holy soul therein, and resting in his love. We have, then, abundant encouragement to draw nigh to the throne of grace, to be made partakers of what God is so willing to give out unto us.

And to this end serves also the oath of God, before insisted on, —namely, to root out all the secret reserves of unbelief concerning God's unwillingness to give mercy, grace, and pardon unto sinners. See Heb. vi. 17, 18, where it is expressed. Therefore, the tendency of our former argument is, not merely to prove that there is forgiveness with God, which we may believe and not be mistaken, but which we ought to believe; it is our duty so to do. We think it our duty to pray, to hear the word, to give alms, to love the brethren, and to abstain from sin; and if we fail in any of these, we find the guilt of them reflected upon our conscience, unto our disquietment: but we scarce think it our duty to believe the forgiveness of our sins. It is well, it may be, we think, with them that can do it; but we think it not their fault who do not. Such persons may be pitied, but, as we suppose, not justly blamed, no, not by God himself. Whose conscience almost is burdened with this as a sin, that he doth not, as he ought, believe the forgiveness of his sins? And this is merely because men judge it not their duty so to do; for a non-performance of a duty, apprehended to be such, will reflect on the conscience a sense of the guilt of sin. But now what can be required to make any thing a duty unto us that is wanting in this matter? for,—

1. There *is forgiveness with God*, and this manifested, revealed, declared. This manifestation of it is that which makes it the object of our faith. We believe things to be in God and with him, not merely and formally because they are so, but because he hath manifested and revealed them so to be, 1 John i. 2. What he so declares it is our duty to believe, or we frustrate the end of his revelation.

2. We are expressly *commanded* to believe, and that upon the highest promises and under the greatest penalties. This command is that which makes believing formally a duty. Faith is a grace, as it is freely wrought in us by the Holy Ghost; the root of all obedience and duties, as it is radically fixed in the heart; but as it is commanded, it is a duty. And these commands, you know, are several ways expressed, by invitations, exhortations, propositions; which all have in them the nature of commands, which take up a great part of the books of the New Testament.

Digitized by Google

3. It is a duty, as we have showed, of the *greatest concernment* unto the glory of God.

4. Of the *greatest importance* unto our souls here and hereafter. And these things were necessary to be added, to bottom our ensuing exhortations upon.

Evidences that most men do not believe forgiveness.

THAT which should now ensue is the peculiar improvement of this truth, all along aimed at,—namely, to give exhortations and encouragements unto believing; but I can take few steps in this work, wherein methinks I do not hear some saying, "Surely all this is needless. Who is there that doth not believe all that you go about to prove? and so these pains are spent to little or no purpose." I shall, therefore, before I persuade any unto it, endeavour to show that they do it not already. Many, I say, the most of men who live under the dispensation of the gospel, do wofully deceive their own souls in this matter. They do not believe what they profess themselves to believe, and what they think they believe. Men talk of "fundamental errors;" this is to me the most fundamental error that any can fall into, and the most pernicious. It is made up of these two parts:—1. *They do not indeed believe forgiveness.* 2. *They suppose they do believe it,* which keeps them from seeking after the only remedy. Both these mistakes are in the foundation, and do ruin the souls of them that live and die in them. I shall, then, by a brief inquiry, put this matter to a trial. By some plain rules and principles may this important question, whether we do indeed believe forgiveness or no, be answered and decided. But to the resolution intended, I shall premise two observations:—

1. Men in this case are *very apt to deceive themselves.* Self-love, vain hopes, liking of lust, common false principles, sloth, unwillingness unto self-examination, reputation with the world, and it may be in the church, all vigorously concur unto men's self-deceivings in this matter. It is no easy thing for a soul to break through all these, and all self-reasonings that rise from them, to come unto a clear judgment of its own acting in dealing with God about forgiveness. Men also find a common presumption of this truth, and its being an easy relief against gripings of conscience and disturbing thoughts about sin, which they daily meet withal. Aiming, therefore, only at the removal of trouble, and finding their present imagination

Digitized by Google

of it sufficient thereunto, they never bring their persuasion to the trial.

2. As men are apt to do thus, *so they actually do so;* they do deceive themselves, and know not that they do so. The last day will make this evident, if men will no sooner be convinced of their folly. When our Saviour told his disciples that one of them twelve should betray him, though it were but one of twelve that was in danger, yet every one of the twelve made a particular inquiry about himself. I will not say that one in each twelve is here mistaken; but I am sure the Truth tells us that "many are called, but few are chosen." They are but few who do really believe forgiveness. Is it not, then, incumbent on every one to be inquiring in what number he is likely to be found at the last day? Whilst men put this inquiry off from themselves, and think or say, "It may be the concernment of others, it is not mine," they perish, and that without remedy. Remember what poor Jacob said when he had lost one child, and was afraid of the loss of another: Gen. xliii. 14, "If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." As if he should have said, "If I lose my children, I have no more to lose; they are my all. Nothing worse can befall me in this world. Comfort, joy, yea, life and all, go with them." How much more may men say in this case, "If we are deceived here, we are deceived; all is lost. Hope, and life, and soul, all must perish, and that for ever!" There is no help or relief for them who deceive themselves in this matter. They have found out a way to go quietly down into the pit.

Now, these things are premised only that they may be incentives unto self-examination in this matter, and so render the ensuing considerations useful. Let us, then, address ourselves unto them:—

1. In general, *This is a gospel truth;* yea, the great fundamental and most important truth of the gospel. It is the turning-point of the two covenants, as God himself declares, Heb. viii. 7–13. Now, a very easy consideration of the ways and walkings of men will satisfy us as to this inquiry, whether they do indeed believe the gospel, the covenant of grace, and the fundamental principles of it. Certainly their ignorance, darkness, blindness, their corrupt affections, and worldly conversations, their earthly-mindedness, and open disavowing of the spirit, ways, and yoke of Christ, speak no such language. Shall we think that proud, heady, worldly self-seekers, haters of the people of God and his ways, despisers of the Spirit of grace and his work, sacrificers to their own lusts, and such like, do believe the covenant of grace or remission of sins? God forbid we should entertain any one thought of so great dishonour to the gospel! Wherever that is received or believed it produceth other effects,

Digitized by Google

Tit. ii. 11, 12; Isa. xi. 6–9. It "teacheth men to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts." It changeth their hearts, natures, and ways. It is not such a barren, impotent, and fruitless thing as such an apprehension would represent it.

2. They that really *believe forgiveness* in God do thereby *obtain forgiveness*. *Believing* gives an *interest* in it; it brings it home to the soul concerned. This is the inviolable law of the gospel. Believing and forgiveness are inseparably conjoined. Among the evidences that we may have of any one being interested in forgiveness, I shall only name one,—*they prize and value it above all the world.* Let us inquire what esteem and valuation many of those have of forgiveness, who put it out of all question that they do believe it. Do they look upon it as their treasure, their jewel, their pearl of price? Are they solicitous about it? Do they often look and examine whether it continues safe in their possession or no? Suppose a man have a precious jewel laid up in some place in his house; suppose it be unto him as the poor widow's two mites, all her substance or living;—will he not carefully ponder on it? will he not frequently satisfy himself that it is safe? We may know that such a house, such fields or lands, do not belong unto a man, when he passeth by them daily and taketh little or no notice of them. Now, how do most men look upon forgiveness? what is their common deportment in reference unto it? Are their hearts continually filled with thoughts about it? Are they solicitous concerning their interest in it? Do they reckon that whilst that is safe all is safe with them? When it is, as it were, laid out of the way by sin and unbelief, do they give themselves no rest until it be afresh discovered unto them? Is this the frame of the most of men? The Lord knows it is not. They talk of forgiveness, but esteem it not, prize it not, make no particular inquiries after it. They put it to an ungrounded venture whether ever they be partakers of it or no. For a relief against some pangs of conscience it is called upon, or else scarce thought of at all.

Let not any so minded flatter themselves that they have any acquaintance with the mystery of gospel forgiveness.

3. Let it be inquired of them who pretend unto this persuasion *how they came by it*, that we may know whether it be of Him who calleth us or no; that we may try whether they have broken through the difficulties, in the entertaining of it, which we have manifested abundantly to lie in the way of it.

When Peter confessed our Saviour to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God," he told him that "flesh and blood did not reveal that unto him, but his Father who is in heaven," Matt. xvi. 17. It is so with them who indeed believe forgiveness in God: "flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto them;"—it hath not been furthered

Digitized by Google

by any thing within them or without them, but all lies in opposition unto it. "This is the work of God, that we believe," John vi. 29;—a great work, the greatest work that God requireth of us. It is not only a great thing in itself (the grace of believing is a great thing), but it is great in respect of its object, or what we have to believe, or forgiveness itself. The great honour of Abraham's faith lay in this, that deaths and difficulties lay in the way of it, Rom. iv. 18–20. But what is a dead body and a dead womb to an accusing conscience, a killing law, and apprehensions of a God terrible as a consuming fire? all which, as was showed, oppose themselves unto a soul called to believe forgiveness.

What, now, have the most of men, who are confident in the profession of this faith, to say unto this thing? Let them speak clearly, and they must say that indeed they never found the least difficulty in this matter; they never doubted of it, they never questioned it, nor do know any reason why they should do so. It is a thing which they have so taken for granted as that it never cost them an hour's labour, prayer, or meditation about it. Have they had secret reasonings and contendings in their hearts about it? No. Have they considered how the objections that lie against it may be removed? Not at all. But is it so, indeed, that this persuasion is thus bred in you, you know not how? Are the corrupted natures of men and the gospel so suited, so complying? Is the new covenant grown so connatural to flesh and blood? Is the greatest secret that ever was revealed from the bosom of the Father become so familiar and easy to the wisdom of the flesh? Is that which was folly to the wise Greeks, and a stumbling-block to the wonder-gazing Jews, become, on a sudden, wisdom and a plain path to the same principles that were in them? But the truth of this matter is, that such men have a general, useless, barren notion of pardon, which Satan, presumption, tradition, common reports, and the customary hearing of the word, have furnished them withal; but for that gospel discovery of forgiveness whereof we have been speaking, they are utterly ignorant of it and unacquainted with it. To convince such poor creatures of the folly of their presumption, I would but desire them to go to some real believers that are or may be known unto them. Let them be asked whether they came so easily by their faith and apprehensions of forgiveness or no. "Alas!" saith one, "these twenty years have I been following after God, and yet I have not arrived unto an abiding cheering persuasion of it." "I know what it cost me, what trials, difficulties, temptations I wrestled with, and went through withal, before I obtained it," saith another. "What I have attained unto hath been of unspeakable mercy; and it is my daily prayer that I may be preserved in it by the exceeding greatness of the

Digitized by Google

power of God, for I continually wrestle with storms that are ready to drive me from my anchor." A little of this discourse may be sufficient to convince poor, dark, carnal creatures of the folly and vanity of their confidence.

4. There are *certain means* whereby the revelation and discovery of this mystery is made unto the souls of men. By these they do obtain it, or they obtain it not. The mystery itself was a secret, hidden in the counsel of God from eternity; nor was there any way whereby it might be revealed but by the Son of God, and that is done in the word of the gospel. If, then, you say you know it, let us inquire how you came so to do, and by what means it hath been declared unto you. Hath this been done by a word of truth,—by the promise of the gospel? Was it by preaching of the word unto you, or by reading of it, or meditating upon it? or did you receive it from and by some seasonable word of or from the Scriptures spoken unto you? or hath it insensibly gotten ground upon your hearts and minds, upon the strivings and conflicts of your souls about sin, from the truth wherein you had been instructed in general? or by what other ways or means have you come to that acquaintance with it whereof you boast? You can tell how you came by your wealth, your gold and silver; you know how you became learned, or obtained the knowledge of the mystery of your trade, who taught you in it, and how you came by it. There is not any thing wherein you are concerned but you can answer these inquiries in a reference unto it. Think it, then, no great matter if you are put to answer this question also:—By what way or means came you to the knowledge of forgiveness which you boast of? Was it by any of those before mentioned, or some other? If you cannot answer distinctly to these things, only you say you have heard it and believed it ever since you can remember (so those said that went before you, so they say with whom you do converse; you never met with any one that called it into question, nor heard of any, unless it were one or two despairing wretches), it will be justly questioned whether you have any portion in this matter or no. If uncertain rumours, reports, general notions, lie at the bottom of your persuasion, do not suppose that you have any communion with Christ therein.

5. Of them who profess to believe forgiveness, *how few are there who indeed know what it is!* They believe, they say; but as the Samaritans worshipped,—they "know not what." With some, a bold presumption, and crying "Peace, peace," goes for the belief of forgiveness. A general apprehension of impunity from God, and that they are sinners, yet they shall not be punished, passeth with others at the same rate. Some think they shall prevail with God by their prayers and desires to let them alone, and not cast them into hell.

Digitized by Google

One way or other to escape the vengeance of hell, not to be punished in another world, is that which men fix their minds upon. But is this that forgiveness which is revealed in the gospel? that which we have been treating about? The rise and spring of our forgiveness is in the heart and gracious nature of God, declared by his name. Have you inquired seriously into this? Have you stood at the shore of that infinite ocean of goodness and love? Have your souls found supportment and relief from that consideration? and have your hearts leaped within you with the thoughts of it? Or, if you have never been affected in an especial manner herewithal, have you bowed down your souls under the consideration of that sovereign act of the will of God that is the next spring of forgiveness; that glorious acting of free grace, that when all might justly have perished, all having sinned and come short of his glory, God would yet have mercy on some? Have you given up yourselves to this grace? Is this any thing of that you do believe? Suppose you are strangers to this also; what communion with God have you had about it in the blood of Christ? We have showed how forgiveness relates thereunto; how way is made thereby for the exercise of mercy, in a consistency with the glory and honour of the justice of God and of his law; how pardon is procured and purchased thereby; with the mysterious reconciliation of love and law, and the new disposal of conscience in its work and duty by it. What have you to say to these things? Have you seen pardon flowing from the heart of the Father through the blood of the Son? Have you looked upon it as the price of his life and the purchase of his blood? Or have you general thoughts that Christ died for sinners, and that on one account or other forgiveness relates unto him, but are strangers to the mystery of this great work? Suppose this also; let us go a little farther, and inquire whether you know any thing that yet remains of the like importance in this matter? Forgiveness, as we have showed, is manifested, tendered, exhibited in the covenant of grace and promises of the gospel. The rule of the efficacy of these is, that they be "mixed with faith," Heb. iv. 2. It is well if you are grown up hereunto; but you that are strangers to the things before mentioned are no less to this also. Upon the matter, you know not, then, what forgiveness is, nor wherein it consists, nor whence it comes, nor how it is procured, nor by what means given out unto sinners. It is to no purpose for such persons to pretend that they believe that whereunto, either notionally or practically, or both, they are such utter strangers.

6. Another inquiry into this matter regards *the state and condition wherein souls must be before it be possible for them to believe forgiveness.* If there be such an estate, and it can be evinced that

Digitized by Google

very many of the pretenders concerning whom we deal were never brought into it, it is then evident that they neither do nor can believe forgiveness, however they do and may delude their own souls.

It hath been showed that the first discovery that was made of pardoning grace was unto Adam, presently after the fall. What was then his state and condition? how was he prepared for the reception of this great mystery in its first discovery? That seems to be a considerable rule of proceeding in the same matter. That which is first in any kind is a rule to all that follows. Now, what was Adam's condition when the revelation of forgiveness was first made to him? It is known from the story. Convinced of sin, afraid of punishment, he lay trembling at the foot of God: then was forgiveness revealed unto him. So the psalmist states it, Ps. cxxx. 3, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" Full of thoughts he is of the desert of sin, and of inevitable and eternal ruin, in case God should deal with him according to the exigence of the law. In that state is the great support of forgiveness with God suggested unto him by the Holy Ghost. We know what work our Saviour had with the Pharisees on this account. "Are we," say they, "blind also?" "No," saith he; "you say you see, 'therefore your sin remaineth,'" John ix. 40, 41;—"It is to no purpose to talk of forgiveness to such persons as you are; you must of necessity abide in your sins. I came not to call such righteous persons as you are, but sinners to repentance; who not only are so, as you are also, and that to the purpose, but are sensible of their being so, and of their undone condition thereby. 'The whole have no need of the physician, but the sick.' Whilst you are seeming righteous and whole, it is to no end to tell you of forgiveness; you cannot understand it nor receive it." It is impossible, then, that any one should, in a due manner, believe forgiveness in God, unless in a due manner he be convinced of sin in himself. If the fallow ground be not broken up, it is to no purpose to sow the seed of the gospel. There is neither life, power, nor sweetness in this truth, unless a door be opened for its entrance by conviction of sin.

Let us, then, on this ground also, continue our inquiry upon the ordinary boasters of their skill in this mystery. You believe there is forgiveness with God? Yes. But have you been convinced of sin? *Yes. You know that you are sinners well enough.* Answer, then, but once more as to the nature of this conviction of sin which you have. Is it not made up of these two ingredients;—1. *A general notion that you are sinners*, as all men also are; 2. *Particular troublesome reflections upon yourselves*, when on any eruption of sin conscience accuses, rebukes, condemns? You will say, "Yes; what would you require more?" This is not the conviction we are

Digitized by Google

inquiring after: that is a work of the Spirit by the word; this you speak of, a mere natural work, which you can no more be without than you can cease to be men. This will give no assistance unto the receiving of forgiveness. But, it may be, you will say you have proceeded farther than so, and these things have had an improvement in you. Let us, then, a little try whether your process has been according to the mind of God, and so whether this invincible bar in your way be removed or no; for although every convinced person do not believe forgiveness, yet no one who is not convinced doth so. Have you, then, been made sensible of your condition by nature, what it is to be alienated from the life of God, and to be obnoxious to his wrath? Have you been convinced of the universal enmity that is in your hearts to the mind of God, and what it is to be at enmity against God? Hath the unspeakable multitude of the sins of your lives been set in order by the law before you? And have you considered what it is for sinners as you are to have to deal with a righteous and a holy God? Hath the Holy Ghost wrought a serious recognition in your hearts of all these things, and caused them to abide with you and upon you? If you will answer truly, you must say, many of you, that indeed you have not been so exercised. You have heard of these things many times, but to say that you have gone through with this work, and have had experience of them, that you cannot do. Then, I say, you are strangers to forgiveness, because you are strangers unto sin. But and if you shall say that you have had thoughts to this purpose, and are persuaded that you have been thoroughly convinced of sin, I shall yet ask you one question more: What effects hath your conviction produced in your hearts and lives? Have you been filled with perplexities and consternation of spirit thereupon? have you had fears, dreads, or terrors, to wrestle withal? It may be you will say, "No;" nor will I insist upon that inquiry. But this I deal with you in: Hath it filled you with self-loathing and abhorrency, with self-condemnation and abasement? If it will do any thing, this it will do. If you come short here, it is justly to be feared that all your other pretences are of no value. Now, where there is *no work of conviction* there is *no faith of forgiveness*, whatever is pretended. And how many vain boasters this sword will cut off is evident.

7. We have yet a greater evidence than all these. ***Men live in sin, and therefore they do not believe forgiveness of sin.*** Faith in general "purifies the heart," Acts xv. 9; our "souls are purified in obeying the truth," 1 Pet. i. 22. And the life is made fruitful by it: James. ii. 22, "Faith worketh by works," and makes itself perfect by them. And the doctrine concerning forgiveness hath a special influence into all holiness: Tit. ii. 11, 12, "The grace of God

Digitized by Google

that bringeth salvation, teacheth us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." And that is the grace whereof we speak. No man can, then, believe forgiveness of sin without a detestation and relinquishment of it. The ground of this might be farther manifested, and the way of the efficacy of faith of forgiveness unto a forsaking of sin, if need were; but all that own the gospel must acknowledge this principle. The real belief of the pardon of sin is prevalent with men not to live longer in sin.

But now, what are the greatest number of those who pretend to receive this truth? Are their hearts purified by it? Are their consciences purged? Are their lives changed? Do they "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts?" Doth forgiveness teach them so to do? Have they found it effectual to these purposes? Whence is it, then, that there is such a bleating and bellowing to the contrary amongst them?

Some of you are drunkards, some of you swearers, some of you unclean persons, some of you liars, some of you worldly, some of you haters of all the ways of Christ, and all his concernments upon the earth; proud, covetous, boasters, self-seekers, envious, wrathful, backbiters, malicious, praters, slanderers, and the like. And shall we think that such as these believe forgiveness of sin? God forbid. Again; some of you are dark, ignorant, blind, utterly unacquainted with the mystery of the gospel, nor do at all make it your business to inquire into it. Either you hear it not at all, or negligently, slothfully, customarily, to no purpose. Let not such persons deceive their own souls; to live in sin and yet to believe the forgiveness of sin is utterly impossible. Christ will not be a minister of sin, nor give his gospel to be a doctrine of licentiousness for your sakes; nor shall you be forgiven that you may be delivered to do more abominations. God forbid.

If any shall say that they thank God they are no such publicans as those mentioned, they are no drunkards, no swearers, no unclean persons, nor the like, so that they are not concerned in this consideration (their lives and their duties give another account of them), then yet consider farther, that the Pharisees were all that you say of yourselves, and yet the greatest despisers of forgiveness that ever were in the world; and that because they hated the light, on this account, that their deeds were evil. And for your duties you mention, what, I pray, is the root and spring of them? Are they influenced from this faith of forgiveness you boast of or no? May it not be feared that it is utterly otherwise? You do not perform them because you love the gospel, but because you fear the law. If the truth were known, I doubt it would appear that you get nothing by

Digitized by Google

your believing of pardon but an encouragement unto sin. Your goodness, such as it is, springs from another root. It may be, also, that you ward yourselves by it against the strokes of conscience or the guilt of particular sins; this is as bad as the other. It is as good be encouraged unto sin to commit it, as be encouraged under sin so as to be kept from humiliation for it. None under heaven are more remote from the belief of grace and pardon than such persons are; all their righteousness is from the law, and their sin in a great measure from the gospel.

8. They that believe forgiveness in a due manner, *believe it for the ends and purposes for which it is revealed of God.* This will farther improve and carry on the former consideration. If God reveals any thing for one end and purpose, and men use it quite unto another, they do not receive the word of God, nor believe the thing revealed, but steal the word and delude their own souls.

Let us, then, weigh to what ends and purposes this forgiveness was first revealed by God, for which also its manifestation is still continued in the gospel. We have showed before who it was to whom this revelation was first made, and what condition he was in when it was so made unto him. A lost, wretched creature, without hope or help he was; how he should come to obtain acceptance with God he knew not. God reveals forgiveness unto him by Christ to be his all. The intention of God in it was, that a sinner's all should be of grace, Rom. xi. 6. If any thing be added unto it for the same end and purpose, then "grace is no more grace." Again; God intended it as a new foundation of obedience, of love, and thankfulness. That men should love because forgiven, and be holy because pardoned, as I have showed before,—that it might be the righteousness of a sinner, and a spring of new obedience in him, all to the praise of grace,—were God's ends in its revelation.

Our inquiry, then, is, Whether men do receive this revelation as unto these ends, and use it for these purposes, and these only? I might evince the contrary, by passing through the general abuses of the doctrine of grace which are mentioned in the Scripture and common in the world; but it will not be needful. Instead of believing, the most of men seem to put a studied despite on the gospel. They either proclaim it to be an *unholy and polluted way*, by turning its grace into lasciviousness, or *a weak and insufficient way*, by striving to twist it in with their own righteousness; both which are an abomination unto the Lord.

From these and such other considerations of the like importance as might be added, it is evident that our word is not in vain, nor the exhortation which is to be built upon it. It appears that notwithstanding the great noise and pretences to this purpose that are in

Digitized by Google

the world, they are but few who seriously receive this fundamental truth of the gospel,—namely, that there is forgiveness with God. Poor creatures sport themselves with their own deceivings, and perish by their own delusions.

Exhortation unto the belief of the forgiveness that is with God—Reasons for it, and the necessity of it.

WE shall now proceed unto the *direct uses* of this great truth; for having laid our foundation in the word that will not fail, and having given, as we hope, sufficient evidence unto the truth of it, our last work is to make that improvement of it unto the good of the souls of men which all along was aimed at. The persons concerned in this truth are *all sinners* whatever. No sort of sinners are unconcerned in it, none are excluded from it. And we may cast them all under two heads:—

First, Such as never yet *sincerely closed with the promise of grace*, nor have ever yet received forgiveness from God in a way of believing. These we have already endeavoured to undeceive, and to discover those false presumptions whereby they are apt to ruin and destroy their own souls. These we would guide now into safe and pleasant paths, wherein they may find assured rest and peace.

Secondly, Others there are who have received it, but being again *entangled by sin*, or *clouded by darkness* and temptations, or *weakened by unbelief*, know not how to improve it to their peace and comfort. This is the condition of the soul represented in this psalm, and which we shall therefore apply ourselves unto in an especial manner in its proper place.

Our exhortation, then, is unto both:—to the first, that they would *receive* it, that they may have *life;* to the latter, that they would *improve* it, that they may have *peace;*—to the former, that they would not overlook, disregard, or neglect so great salvation as is tendered unto them; to the latter, that they would stir up the grace of God that is in them, to mix with the grace of God that is declared unto them.

I shall begin with the first sort,—those who are yet utter strangers from the covenant of grace, who never yet upon saving grounds believed this forgiveness, who never yet once tasted of gospel pardon. Poor sinners! this word is unto you.

Be it that you have heard or read the same word before, or others like unto it, to the same purpose,—it may be often, it may be a hun-

Digitized by Google

dred times,—it is your concernment to hear it again; God would have it so; the testimony of Jesus Christ is thus to be accomplished. This "counsel of God" we must "declare," that we may be "pure from the blood of all men," Acts xx. 26, 27; and that not once or twice, but in preaching the word we must be "instant in season, out of season; reproving, rebuking, exhorting with all long-suffering and doctrine," 2 Tim. iv. 2. And for you, woe unto you when God leaves thus speaking unto you! when he refuseth to exhort you any more, woe unto you! This is God's departure from any person or people, when he will deal with them no more about forgiveness; and saith he, "Woe to them when I depart from them!" Hos. ix. 12. O that God, therefore, would give unto such persons seeing eyes and hearing ears, that the word of grace may never more be spoken unto them in vain!

Now, in our exhortation to such persons, we shall proceed gradually, according as the matter will bear, and the nature of it doth require. Consider, therefore,—

First, That *notwithstanding all your sins*, all the evil that your own hearts know you to be guilty of, and that hidden mass or evil treasure of sin which is in you, which you are not able to look into; notwithstanding that charge that lies upon you from your own consciences, and that dreadful sentence and curse of the law which you are obnoxious unto; notwithstanding all the just grounds that you have to apprehend that God is your enemy, and will be so unto eternity;—yet *there are terms of peace* and reconciliation provided and proposed between him and your souls. This, in the first place, is spoken out by the word we have insisted on. Whatever else it informs us of, this it positively asserts,—namely, that there is a way whereby sinners may come to be accepted with God; for "there is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared." And we hope that we have not confirmed it by so many testimonies, by so many evidences, in vain. Now, that you may see how great a privilege this is, and how much your concernment lies in it, consider,—

1. That *this belongs unto you in an especial manner;* it is your peculiar advantage.

It is not so with the *angels* that sinned. There were never any terms of peace or reconciliation proposed unto them, nor ever shall be, unto eternity. There is no way of escape provided for them. Having once sinned, as you have done a thousand times, God "spared them not, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment," 2 Pet. ii. 4.

It is not so with them that are *dead* in their sins, if but one moment past. Ah! how would many souls who are departed, it may be not an hour since, out of this world, rejoice for an interest

Digitized by Google

in this privilege, the hearing of terms of peace, once more, between God and them! But their time is past, their house is left unto them desolate. As the tree falleth, so it must lie: "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment," Heb. ix. 27. After death there are no terms of peace, nothing but judgment. "The living, the living," he alone is capable of this advantage.

It is not so with them to whom *the gospel is not preached.* God suffers them to walk in their own ways, and calls them not thus to repentance. The terms of reconciliation which some fancy to be offered in the shining of the sun and falling of the rain, never brought souls to peace with God. Life and immortality are brought to light only by the gospel. This is your privilege who yet live, and yet have the word sounding in your ears.

It is not thus with *them who have sinned against the Holy Ghost,* though yet alive, and living where the word of forgiveness is preached. God proposeth unto them no terms of reconciliation. "Blasphemy against him," saith Christ, "shall not be forgiven," Matt. xii. 31. There is no forgiveness for such sinners; and we, if we knew them, ought not to pray for them, 1 John v. 16. Their sin is "unto death." And what number may be in this condition God knows.

This word, then, is unto you; these terms of peace are proposed unto you. This is that which in an especial manner you are to apply yourselves unto; and woe unto you if you should be found to have neglected it at the last day! Wherefore, consider,—

2. *By whom these terms are proposed unto you,* and by whom they were procured for you. By whom are they proposed? Who shall undertake to umpire the business, the controversy between God and sinners? No creature, doubtless, is either meet or worthy to interpose in this matter,—I mean, originally on his own account; for "who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?" Wherefore, it is God himself who proposeth these terms; and not only proposeth them, but invites, exhorts, and persuades you to accept of them. This the whole Scriptures testify unto. It is fully expressed, 2 Cor. v. 18–20. He hath provided them, he hath proposed them, and makes use only of men, of ministers, to act in his name. And excuse us if we are a little earnest with you in this matter. Alas! our utmost that we can, by zeal for his glory or compassion unto your souls, raise our thoughts, minds, spirits, words unto, comes infinitely short of his own pressing earnestness herein. See Isa. lv. 1–4. Oh, infinite condescension! Oh, blessed grace! Who is this that thus bespeaks you? He against whom you have sinned, of whom you are justly afraid; he whose laws you have broken, and whose name you have dishonoured; he who needs

Digitized by Google

not you, nor your love, nor your friendship, nor your salvation! It is he who proposeth unto you these terms of reconciliation and peace! Consider the exhortation of the apostle upon this consideration: Heb. xii. 25, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh from heaven." It is God that speaks unto you in this matter, and he speaks unto you from heaven. And he doth therein forego all the advantage that he hath against you for your destruction. Woe would be unto your souls, and that for ever, if you should refuse him.

3. *By whom were these terms procured for you?* and by what means? Do not think that this matter was brought about by chance, or by an ordinary undertaking. Remember that the proposal made unto you this day cost no less than the price of the blood of the Son of God. It is the fruit of the travail of his soul. For this he prayed, he wept, he suffered, he died. And shall it now be neglected or despised by you? Will you yet account the blood of the covenant to be a common thing? Will you exclude yourselves from all benefit of the purchase of these terms, and only leave your souls to answer for the contempt of the price whereby they were purchased?

4. Consider that *you are sinners, great sinners, cursed sinners;* some of you, it may be, worse than innumerable of your fellow-sinners were who are now in hell. God might long since have cast you off everlastingly from all expectation of mercy, and have caused all your hopes to perish; or he might have left you alive, and yet have refused to deal with you any more. He could have caused your sun to go down at noon-day, and have given you darkness instead of vision. He could respite your lives for a season, and yet "swear in his wrath that you should never enter into his rest." It is now otherwise. How long it may be so, nor you nor I know any thing at all. God only knows what will be your time, what your continuance. We are to speak whilst it is called "To-day." And this is that for the present which I have to offer unto you:—God declares that there is forgiveness with him, that your condition is not desperate nor helpless. There are yet terms of peace proposed unto you. Methinks it cannot but seem strange that poor sinners should not at the least stir up themselves to inquire after them. When a poor man had sold himself of old and his children to be servants, and parted with the land of his inheritance unto another, because of his poverty, with what heart do you think did he hear the sound of the trumpet when it began to proclaim the year of jubilee, wherein he and all his were to go out at liberty, and to return unto his possession and inheritance? And shall not poor servants of sin, slaves unto Satan, that have forfeited all their inheritance in this world and that which is to come, attend unto any proclamation of the year of rest, of the ac-

Digitized by Google

ceptable year of the Lord? And this is done in the tender of terms of peace with God in this matter. Do not put it off; this belongs unto you; the great concernment of your souls lies in it. And it is a great matter; for consider,—

5. That *when the angels came to bring the news of the birth of our Lord Jesus, they say, "We bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people,"* Luke ii. 10. What are these joyful tidings? what was the matter of this report? Why, "This day is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord," verse 11. It is only this, "A Saviour is born; a way of escape is provided," and farther they do not proceed. Yet this they say is a matter of "great joy;" as it was indeed. It is so to every burdened, convinced sinner, a matter of unspeakable joy and rejoicing. Oh, blessed words! "A Saviour is born!" This gives life to a sinner, and opens "a door of hope in the valley of Achor," the first rescue of a sin-distressed soul. Upon the matter, it was all that the saints for many ages had to live upon; and that not in the enjoyment, but only the expectation. They lived on that word, "The seed of the woman shall break the serpent's head;" that is, a way of deliverance is provided for sinners. This with all "diligence they inquired into," 1 Pet. i. 10–12; and improved it to their eternal advantage. As of old, Jacob, when he saw the waggons that his son Joseph had sent to bring him unto him, it is said his spirit "revived;" so did they upon their obscure discovery of a way of forgiveness. They looked upon the promise of it as that which God had sent to bring them unto him; and they saw the day of the coming of Christ in it, and rejoiced. How much more have sinners now reason so to do, when the substance of the promise is exhibited, and the news of his coming proclaimed unto them! This, then, is a great matter,—namely, that terms of peace and reconciliation are proposed, in that it is made known that there is forgiveness with God. Upon these considerations, then, we pursue that exhortation which we have in hand.

If any of you were justly condemned to a cruel and shameful death, and lay trembling in the expectation of the execution of it, and a man designed for that purpose should come unto him and tell him that there were terms propounded on which his life might be spared, only he came away like Ahimaaz before he heard the particulars;—would it not be a reviving unto him? Would he not cry out, "Pray, inquire what they are; for there is not any thing so difficult which I will not undergo to free myself from this miserable condition?" Would it not change the whole frame of the spirit of such a man, and, as it were, put new life into him? But now, if, instead hereof, he should be froward, stubborn, and obstinate, take no notice of the messenger, or say, "Let the judge keep his terms to himself," without inquiring what they are, that he would have no-

Digitized by Google

thing to do with them;—would not such a person be deemed to perish deservedly? Doth he not bring a double destruction upon himself,—first of deserving death by his crimes, and then by refusing the honest and good way of delivery tendered unto him? I confess it oftentimes falls out that men may come to inquire after these terms of peace, which, when they are revealed, they like them not, but, with the young man in the gospel, they go away sorrowful: the cursed wickedness and misery of which condition, which befalls many convinced persons, shall be spoken unto afterwards; at present I speak unto them who never yet attended in sincerity unto these terms, nor seriously inquired after them. Think you what you please of your condition and of yourselves, or choose whether you will think of it or no,—pass your time in a full regardlessness of your present and future estate,—yet, indeed, thus it is with you as to your eternal concerns: you lie under the sentence of a bitter, shameful, and everlasting death; you have done so in the midst of all your jollity, ever since you came into this world; and you are in the hand of Him who can, in the twinkling of an eye, destroy both body and soul in hell-fire. In this state and condition men are sent on purpose to let you know that there are terms of peace, there is yet a way of escape for you; and that you may not avoid the issue aimed at, they tell you that God, that cannot lie, hath commanded them to tell you so. If you question the truth of what they say, they are ready to produce their warrant under God's own hand and seal. Here, then, is no room for tergiversation or excuses. Certainly, if you have any care of your eternal estate, if you have any drop of tender blood running in your veins towards your own souls, if you have any rational considerations dwelling in your minds, if all be not defaced and obliterated through the power of lust and love of sin, you cannot but take yourselves to be unspeakably concerned in this proposal. But now, if, instead hereof, you give up yourselves unto the power of unbelief, the will of Satan, the love of your lusts and this present world, so as to take no notice of this errand or message from God, nor once seriously to inquire after the nature and importance of the terms proposed, can you escape? shall you be delivered? will your latter end be peace? The Lord knows it will be otherwise with you, and that unto eternity.

So the apostle assures us, 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." If you receive not this word, if it be hid from you, it is from the power and efficacy of Satan upon your minds. And what will be the end? Perish you must and shall, and that for ever.

Digitized by Google

Remember the parable of our Saviour: Luke xiv. 31, 32, "What king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace." That which he teacheth in this parable is, the necessity that lies on us of making peace with God, whom we have provoked, and justly made to be our enemy; as also our utter impotency to resist and withstand him when he shall come forth in a way of judgment and vengeance against us. But here lies a difference in this matter, such as is allowed in all similitudes. Amongst men at variance, it is not his part who is the stronger, and secure of success, to send to the weaker, whom he hath in his power, to accept of terms of peace. Here it is otherwise: God, who is infinitely powerful, justly provoked, and able to destroy poor sinners in a moment, when now he is not very far off, but at the very door, sends himself an ambassage with conditions of peace. And shall he be refused by you? will you yet neglect his offers? How great, then, will be your destruction!

Hear, then, once more, poor sin-hardened, senseless souls, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness. Is it nothing unto you that the great and holy God, whom ye have provoked all your days, and whom you yet continue to provoke,—who hath not the least need of you or your salvation,—who can, when he pleaseth, eternally glorify himself in your destruction,—should of his own accord send unto you, to let you know that he is willing to be at peace with you on the terms he had prepared? The enmity began on your part, the danger is on your part only, and he might justly expect that the message for peace should begin on your part also; but he begins with you. And shall he be rejected? The prophet well expresseth this, Isa. xxx. 15, "Thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not." The love and condescension that is in these words, on the one hand, on the part of God, and the folly and ingratitude mentioned in them on the other hand, is inexpressible. They are fearful words, "But ye would not." Remember this against another day. As our Saviour says, in the like manner, to the Jews, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." Whatever is pretended, it is will and stubbornness that lie at the bottom of this refusal.

Wherefore, that either you may obtain advantage by it, or that the way of the Lord may be prepared for the glorifying of himself upon you, I shall leave this word before all them that hear or read it, as the testimony which God requires to be given unto his grace.

Digitized by Google

There are terms of peace with God provided for and tendered unto you. It is yet called To-day; harden not your hearts like them of old, who could not enter into the rest of God by reason of unbelief, Heb. iii. 19. Some of you, it may be, are old in sins and unacquainted with God; some of you, it may be, have been great sinners, scandalous sinners; and some of you, it may be, have reason to apprehend yourselves near the grave, and so also to hell; some of you, it may be, have your consciences disquieted and galled; and it may be some of you are under some outward troubles and perplexities, that cause you a little to look about you; and some of you, it may be, are in the madness of your natural strength and lusts,—"your breasts are full of milk and your bones of marrow," and your hearts of sin, pride, and contempt of the ways of God. All is one: this word is unto you all; and I shall only mind you that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." You hear the voice or read the words of a poor worm; but the message is the message, and the word is the word, of Him who shaketh heaven and earth. Consider, then, well what you have to do, and what answer you will return unto Him who will not be mocked.

But you will say, "Why, what great matter is there that you have in hand? Why is it urged with so much earnestness? We have heard the same words a hundred times over. The last Lord's day such a one, or such a one, preached to the same purpose; and what need it be insisted on now again with so much importunity?"

But is it so, indeed, that you have thus frequently been dealt withal, and do yet continue in an estate of irreconciliation? My heart is pained for you, to think of your woful and almost remediless condition. If "he that being often reproved, and yet hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy," Prov. xxix. 1, how much more will he be so who, being often invited unto peace with God, yet hardeneth his heart, and refuseth to treat with him! Methinks I hear his voice concerning you: "Those mine enemies, they shall not taste of the supper that I have prepared." Be it, then, that the word in hand is a common word unto you, you set no value upon it,—then take your way and course in sin; stumble, fall, and perish. It is not so slight a matter to poor convinced sinners, that tremble at the word of God. These will prize it and improve it. We shall follow, then, that counsel, chap. xxxi. 6, "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts." We shall tender this new wine of the gospel to poor, sad-hearted, conscience-distressed sinners,—sinners that are ready to perish: to them it will be pleasant; they will drink of it and forget their poverty, and remember their misery no more. It shall take away all their sorrow and sadness, when you shall be drunk

Digitized by Google

with the fruit of your lusts, and spue, and lie down and not rise again.

But now, if any of you shall begin to say in your hearts that you would willingly treat with God,—"Oh that the day were come wherein we might approach unto him! let him speak what he pleaseth, and propose what terms he pleaseth, we are ready to hear,"—then consider,—

Secondly, That the terms provided for you, and proposed unto you, are *equal, holy, righteous,* yea, *pleasant* and *easy.* This being another general head of our work in hand, before I proceed to the farther explication and confirmation of it, I shall educe one or two observations from what hath been delivered on the first; as,—

1. See here on what *foundation* we preach the gospel. Many disputes there are whether Christ died for all individuals of mankind or no. If we say, "No, but only for the elect, who are some of all sorts;" some then tell us we cannot invite all men promiscuously to believe. But why so? We invite not men as all men, no man as one of all men, but all men as sinners; and we know that Christ died for sinners. But is this the first thing that we are, in the dispensation of the gospel, to propose to the soul of a sinner under the law, that *Christ died for him in particular?* Is that the beginning of our message unto him? Were not this a ready way to induce him to conclude, "Let me, then, continue in sin, that grace may abound?"—No; but this is in order of nature our first work, even that which we have had in hand; this is the "beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ;" this is "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord:"—"There is a way of reconciliation provided. 'God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself.' There is a way of acceptance; there is forgiveness with him to be obtained." At this threshold of the Lord's house doth the greatest part of men to whom the gospel is preached fall and perish, never looking in to see the treasures that are in the house itself, never coming into any such state and condition wherein they have any ground or bottom to inquire whether Christ died for them in particular or no. They believe not this report, nor take any serious notice of it. This was the ministry of the Baptist, and they who received it not "rejected the counsel of God" concerning their salvation, Luke vii. 10, and so perished in their sins. This is the sum of the blessed invitation given by Wisdom, Prov. ix. 1–5. And here men stumble, fall, and perish, chap. i. 29, 30.

2. You that have found grace and favour to accept of these terms, and thereby to obtain peace with God, learn to *live in a holy admiration of his condescension* and love therein. That he would provide such terms; that he would reveal them unto you; that he

Digitized by Google

would enable you to receive them;—unspeakable love and grace lies in it all. Many have not these terms revealed unto them; few find favour to accept of them. And of whom is it that you have obtained this peculiar mercy?

Do you aright consider the nature of this matter? The Scripture proposeth it as an object of eternal admiration: "So God loved the world;" "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us" first. Live in this admiration, and do your utmost, in your several capacities, to prevail with your friends, relations, acquaintance, to hearken after this great treaty of peace with God, whose terms we shall nextly consider, as before in general they were expressed.

Secondly, The terms provided for you, and proposed unto you, are equal, holy, righteous, yea, pleasant and easy, Hos. ii. 18, 19. They are not such as a cursed, guilty sinner might justly expect, but such as are meet for an infinitely good and gracious God to propose;—not suited to the wisdom of man, but full of the "wisdom of God," 2 Cor. ii. 6, 7. The poor, convinced wretch thinking of dealing with God, Micah vi. 6, 7, rolls in his mind what terms he is like to meet withal; and fixes on the most dreadful, difficult, and impossible that can be imagined. "If," saith he, "any thing be done with this great and most high God, it must be by 'rivers,' 'thousands,' and 'ten thousands,' children, 'first-born;' whatever is dreadful and terrible to nature, whatever is impossible for me to perform, that is it which he looks for." But the matter is quite otherwise. The terms are wholly of another nature: it is a way of mere mercy, a way of free forgiveness. The apostle lays it down, Rom. iii. 21–26. It is a way of propitiation, of pardon, of forgiveness in the blood of Christ; the terms are, the acceptance of the forgiveness that we have described. Who would not think, now, that the whole world would run in to be made partakers of these terms, willingly accepting of them? But it proves for the most part quite otherwise. Men like not this way, of all others. "It had been something," says Naaman, "if the prophet had come and done so and so; but this, 'Go wash, and be clean,' I do not like it; I am but deluded." Men think within themselves, that had it been some great thing that was required of them that they might be saved, they would with all speed address themselves thereunto; but to come to God by Christ, to be freely forgiven, without more ado, they like it not. Some rigid, austere penances, some compensatory obedience, some satisfactory mortification or purgatory, had been a more likely way. This of mere pardon in and by the cross, it is but folly, 1 Cor. i. 18, 20. "I had rather," saith the Jew, "have it 'as it were by the works of the law,' Rom. ix. 32, x. 3. This way of grace and forgiveness I like not." So say others also; so practise others every

Digitized by Google

day. Either this way is wholly rejected, or it is mended by some additions; which with God is all one with the rejection of it.

Here multitudes of souls deceive themselves and perish. I know not whether it be more difficult to persuade an unconvinced person to think of any terms, or a convinced person to accept of these. Let men say what they will, and pretend what they please, yet practically they like not this way of forgiveness. I shall therefore offer some subservient considerations, tending to the furtherance of your souls in the acceptance of the terms proposed:—

1. This is the way, these are *the terms of God's own choosing;* he found out this way, he established it himself. He did it when all was lost and undone. He did it, not upon our desire, request, or proposal, but merely of his own accord; and why should we contend with him about it? If God will have us saved in a way of mere mercy and forgiveness, if his wisdom and sovereignty be in it, shall we oppose him, and say we like it not? Yet this is the language of unbelief, Rom. x. 3. Many poor creatures have disputed it with God, until at length, being overpowered as it were by the Spirit, [they] have said, "If it must be so, and God will save us by mercy and grace, let it be so; we yield ourselves to his will;" and yet throughout their disputes dreamed of nothing but that their own unworthiness only kept them from closing with the promise of the gospel.

Of this nature was that way of Satan whereby he deceived our first parents of their interest in the covenant of works. "The terms of it," saith he, "as apprehended by you, are unequal. 'Yea, hath God said, Ye shall eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil ye shall not eat, lest ye die?' Come; 'ye shall not die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof then your eyes shall be opened.' There is no proportion between the disobedience and the threatening; the issue cannot be such as is feared." And by these means he ruined them. Thus, also, he proceeds to deprive souls of their interest in the covenant of grace, whereunto they are invited: "The terms of it are unequal, how can any man believe them? There is no proportion between the obedience and the promise. To have pardon, forgiveness, life, and a blessed eternity, on believing!—who can rest in it?" And here lies a conspiracy between Satan and unbelief, against the wisdom, goodness, love, grace, and sovereignty of God. The poison of this deceit lies in this, that neither the righteousness nor the mercy of God is of that infiniteness as indeed they are. The apostle, to remove this fond imagination, calls us to the pleasure of God: 1 Cor. i. 21, "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching,"—that is, by the gospel preached, which they esteemed foolishness,—"to save them that believe." He suffered men, indeed, to make trial of other ways; and when their insufficiency for the ends

Digitized by Google

men proposed to themselves was sufficiently manifested, it pleased him to reveal his way. And what are we, that we should contend about it with him? This rejection of the way of personal righteousness, and choosing the way of grace and forgiveness, God asserts: Jer. xxxi. 31–34, "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers" (in which administration of the covenant, as far as it had respect unto typical mercies, much depended on their personal obedience): "but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law," etc., "for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Let, then, this way stand, and the way of man's wisdom and self-righteousness perish for ever.

2. This is the way that *above all others tends directly and immediately to the glory of God.* God hath managed and ordered all things in this way of forgiveness, so as "no flesh should glory in his presence," but that "he that glorieth should glory in the Lord," 1 Cor. i. 29, 31. "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? by the law of works? Nay; but by the law of faith," Rom. iii. 27. It might be easily manifested that God hath so laid the design of saving sinners by forgiveness according to the law of faith, that it is utterly impossible that any soul should, on any account whatever, have the least ground of glorying or boasting in itself, either absolutely or in comparison with them that perish. "If Abraham," saith the same apostle, "were justified by works, he had whereof to glory; but not before God," chap. iv. 2. The obedience of works would have been so infinitely disproportionate to the reward, which was God himself, that there had been no glorying before God, but therein his goodness and grace must be acknowledged; yet in comparison with others who yielded not the obedience required, he would have had wherein to glory: but now this also is cut off by the way of forgiveness, and no pretence is left for any to claim the least share in the glory of it but God alone. And herein lies the excellency of faith, that it "gives glory to God," chap. iv. 20; the denial whereof, under various pretences, is the issue of proud unbelief. And this is that which God will bring all unto, or they shall perish, —namely, that shame be ours, and the whole glory of our salvation be his alone. So he expresseth his design, Isa. xlv. 22–25. Verse 22, he proposeth himself as the only relief for sinners: "Look unto me," saith he, "and be saved, all the ends of the earth." But what if men take some other course, and look well to themselves, and so decline this way of mere mercy and grace? Why, saith he, verse 23, "I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in right-

Digitized by Google

eousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." Look you unto that, "But I have sworn that you shall either do so, or answer your disobedience at the day of judgment;" whereunto Paul applies those words, Rom. xiv. 11. What do the saints hereupon? Isa. xlv. 24, 25, "Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength. In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." They bring their hearts to accept of all righteousness from him, and to give all glory unto him.

God at first placed man in a blessed state and condition,—in such a dependence on himself as that he might have wrought out his eternal happiness with a great reputation of glory unto himself. "Man being in this honour," saith the psalmist, "abode not." God now fixes on another way, as I said, wherein all the glory shall be his own, as the apostle at large sets it forth, Rom. iii. 21–26. Now, neither the way from which Adam fell, nor that wherein some of the angels continued, which for the substance were the same, is to be compared with this of forgiveness, as to the bringing glory unto God. I hate curiosities and conjectures in the things of God, yet, upon the account of the interposition of the blood of Christ, I think I may boldly say there comes more glory to God by saving one sinner in this way of forgiveness, than in giving the reward of blessedness to all the angels in heaven: so seems it to appear from that solemn representation we have of the ascription of glory to God by the whole creation, Rev. v. 9–14. All centres in the bringing forth forgiveness by the blood of the Lamb.

I insist the more on this, because it lies so directly against that cursed principle of unbelief which reigns in the hearts of the most, and often disquiets the best. That a poor ungodly sinner, going to God with the guilt of all his sins upon him, to receive forgiveness at his hand, doth bring more glory unto him than the obedience of an angel, men are not over ready to think, nor can be prepared for it but by itself. And the formal nature of that unbelief which worketh in convinced sinners lies in a refusal to give unto God the whole glory of salvation. There are many hurtful controversies in religion that are managed in the world with great noise and clamour, but this is the greatest and most pernicious of them all; and it is for the most part silently transacted in the souls of men, although under various forms and pretences. It hath also broken forth in writings and disputations;—that is, whether God or man shall have the glory of salvation; or whether it shall wholly be ascribed unto God, or that man also, on one account or other, may come in for a share. Now, if this be the state and condition with any of you, that you will rather perish than God should have his glory, what shall we say

Digitized by Google

but, "Go, ye cursed souls, perish for ever, without the least compassion from God, or any that love him, angels or men."

If you shall say, for your parts you are contented with this course, —let God have the glory, so you may be forgiven and saved; there is yet just cause to suspect lest this be a selfish contempt of God. *It is a great thing to give glory unto God by believing in a due manner.* Such slight returns seem not to have the least relation unto it. Take heed that, instead of believing, you be not found mockers, and so your bands be made strong.

But a poor convinced sinner may here find encouragement. Thou wouldst willingly come to acquaintance with God, and so attain salvation? "Oh, my soul longeth for it!" Wouldst thou willingly take that course for the obtaining those ends which will bring most glory unto God? "Surely it is meet and most equal that I should do so." What, now, if one should come and tell thee from the Lord of a way whereby thou, poor, sinful, self-condemned creature, mightst bring as much glory unto God as any angel in heaven is able to do? "Oh, if I might bring the least glory unto God, I should rejoice in it!" Behold, then, the way which himself hath fixed on for the exaltation of his glory, even that thou shouldst come to him merely upon the account of grace in the blood of Christ for pardon and forgiveness; and the Lord strengthen thee to give up thyself thereunto!

3. Consider that *if this way of salvation be refused, there is no other way for you.* We do not propose this way of forgiveness as the best and most pleasant, but as the only way. There is no other name given but that of Christ; no other way but this of forgiveness. Here lies your choice; take this path, or perish for ever. It is a shame, indeed, unto our cursed nature that there should be any need to use this argument,—that we will neither submit to God's sovereignty nor delight in his glory; but seeing it must be used, let it be so. I intend neither to flatter men nor to frighten them, but to tell them the truth as it is. If you continue in your present state and condition; if you rest on what you do or what you hope to do; if you support yourselves with general hopes of mercy, mixed with your own endeavours and obedience; if you come not up to a thorough gospel-closure with this way of God; if you make it not your all, giving glory to God therein,—perish you will, you must, and that to eternity. There remains no sacrifice for your sins, nor way of escape for your souls. You have not, then, only the excellency of this way to invite you, but the absolute, indispensable necessity of this way to enforce you. And now, let me add that I am glad this word is spoken, is written unto you. You and I must one day be accountable for this discourse. That word that hath already been spoken, if neglected, will prove a sore testimony against you. It will not

Digitized by Google

fare with you as with other men who have not heard the joyful sound. All those words that shall be found consonant to the gospel, if they are not turned to grace in your hearts here, will turn into torment unto your souls hereafter. Choose not any other way; it will be in vain for you; it will not profit you. And take heed lest you suppose you embrace this way when indeed you do not; about which I have given caution before.

4. *This way is free and open for and unto sinners.* He that fled to the city of refuge might well have many perplexed thoughts, whether he should find the gates of it opened unto him or no, and whether the avenger of blood might not overtake and slay him whilst he was calling for entrance. Or if the gates were always open, yet some crimes excluded men thence, Numb. xxxv. 16. It is not so here, Acts xiii. 38, 39.

This is the voice of God, even the Father: "Come," saith he, "to the marriage, for all things are prepared,"—no fear of want of entertainment, Matt. xxii. 4; whence the preachers of the gospel are said in his stead to beseech men to be reconciled, 2 Cor. v. 20. And

It is the voice of the Son: "Whosoever," saith he, "cometh to God by me, 'I will in no wise cast out,'" John vi. 37. Whoever he be that comes shall assuredly find entertainment. The same is his call and invitation in other places, as Matt. xi. 28; John vii. 37. And

This is the voice of the Spirit, and of the church, and of all believers: Rev. xxii. 17, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." All centre in this, that sinners may come freely to the grace of the gospel. And

It is the known voice of the gospel itself, as Isa. lv. 1–3; Prov. ix. 1–5. And

It is the voice of all the saints in heaven and earth, who have been made partakers of forgiveness; they all testify that they received it freely.

Some, indeed, endeavour to abuse this concurrent testimony of God and man. What is spoken of the freedom of the grace of God, they would wrest to the power of the will of man; but the riches and freedom of God's mercy do not in the least interfere with the efficacy of his grace. Though he proclaim pardon in the blood of Christ indefinitely, according to the fulness and excellency of it, yet he giveth out his quickening grace to enable men to receive it as he pleaseth; for he hath mercy on whom he will have mercy. But this lies in the thing itself; the way is opened and prepared, and it is not because men cannot enter, but because they will not, that they do not enter. As our Saviour Christ tells the Pharisees, "Ye

Digitized by Google

therefore hear not God's word, because ye are not of God," John viii. 47, vi. 44; so he doth, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life," John v. 40. In the neglect and inadvertency of the most excusable, there is a positive act of their will put forth in the refusing of Christ and grace by him; and this is done by men under the preaching of the gospel every day. There is nothing that at the last day will tend more immediately to the advancement of the glory of God, in the inexcusableness of them who obey not the gospel, than this, that terms of peace, in the blessed way of forgiveness, were freely tendered unto them. Some that hear or read this word may perhaps have lived long under the dispensation of the word of grace, and yet it may be have never once seriously pondered on this way of coming to God by forgiveness through the blood of Christ, but think that going to heaven is a thing of course, that men need not much trouble themselves about. Do they know what they have done? Hitherto, all their days, they have positively refused the salvation that hath been freely tendered unto them in Jesus Christ. Not they, they will say; they never had such a thought, nor would for all this world. But be it known unto you, inasmuch as you have not effectually received him, you have refused him; and whether your day and season be past or no, the Lord only knows.

5. *This way is safe.* No soul ever miscarried in it. There is none in heaven but will say it is a safe way; there is none in hell can say otherwise. It is safe to all that venture on it so as to enter into it. In the old way we were to preserve ourselves and the way; this preserves itself and us. This will be made evident by the ensuing considerations:—

(1.) This is *the way which, in the wisdom, care, and love of God in Christ, was provided in the room of another,* removed and taken out of the way for this cause and reason, because it was not safe nor could bring us unto God: Heb. viii. 7, 8, "For if the first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. But finding fault with them, he saith," etc. And,—

[1.] He tells us that *the first covenant was not faultless;* for if it had, there would have been no need of a second. The "commandment," indeed, which was the matter of that covenant, the same apostle informs us to be "holy, and just, and good," Rom. vii. 12. But this was faulty as to all ends of a covenant, considering our state and condition as sinners; it could not bring us unto God. So he acquaints us, chap. viii. 3, "It was weak through the flesh,"—that is, by the entrance of sin,—and so became unuseful as to the saving of souls. Be it so, then: through our sin and default this good and holy law, this covenant, was made unprofitable unto us; but

Digitized by Google

what was that unto God? was he bound to desert his own institution and appointment, because through our own default it ceased to be profitable unto us? Not at all. He might righteously have tied us all unto the terms of that covenant, to stand or fall by them unto eternity; but he would not do so. But,—

[2.] In his love and grace he "*finds fault with it*," Heb. viii. 8; not in itself and absolutely, but only so far as that he would provide another way, which should supply all its defects and wants in reference to the end aimed at. What way that is the apostle declares in the following verses to the end of that chapter. The sum is, verse 12, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." It is the way of pardon and forgiveness. This is substituted in the room of that insufficient way that was removed.

Let us consider, then, whether the infinitely wise and holy God, pursuing his purpose of bringing souls unto himself,—laying aside one way of his own appointment as useless and infirm, because of the coming in of sin, against which there was no relief found in it, and substituting another way in the room of it,—would not provide such a one as should be absolutely free from the faults and inconveniences which he charged upon that which he did remove. That which alone rendered the former way faulty was sin; it could do any thing but save a sinner. This, then, was to be, and is, principally provided against in this way of forgiveness. And we see here how clearly God hath severed, yea, and in this matter opposed, these two things,—namely, *the way of personal righteousness* and the *way of forgiveness*. He finds fault with the first. What then doth he do? what course doth he take? Doth he mend it, take from it what seems to be redundant, mitigate its severity, and supply it where it was wanting by forgiveness, and so set it up anew? This, indeed, is the way that many proceed in their notions, and the most in their practice; but this is not the way of God. He takes the one utterly away, and establishes the other in its place. And men's endeavours to mix them will be found of little use to them at the last. I can have no great expectation from that which God pronounced faulty.

(2.) The unchangeable principles and foundations that this way is built upon render it secure and safe for sinners; for,—

[1.] It is founded on the *purpose* of God: Gal. iii. 8, "The Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith." God would do so; he had purposed and determined to proceed this way; and all the purposes of God are attended with immutability. And,—

[2.] His *promise* also is engaged in it, and that given out in the way of a covenant, as hath been already declared. And,—

Digitized by Google

[3.] This promise is confirmed by an *oath;* and it may be observed, that God doth not in any thing interpose with an oath, but what relates to this way of coming to himself by forgiveness; for the oath of God, wherever it is used, respecteth either Christ typically or personally, or the covenant established in him; for,—

[4.] This way is confirmed and ratified in his *blood;* from whence the apostle at large evinceth its absolute security and safety, Heb. ix. Whatever soul, on the invitation under consideration, shall give up himself to come to God by the way proposed, he shall assuredly find absolute peace and security in it. Neither our own weakness or folly from within, nor the opposition of any or all our enemies from without, shall be able to turn us out of this way. See Isa. xxxv. 4–10.

(3.) In the other way, every *individual person stands upon his own bottom*, and must do so to the last and utmost of his continuance in this world. You are desirous to go unto God, to obtain his favour, and come to an enjoyment of him. What will you do, what course will you fix upon, for the obtaining of these ends? If you were so holy, so perfect, so righteous, so free from sin as you could desire, you should have some boldness in going unto God. Why, if this be the way you fix upon, take this along with you: You stand upon your own personal account all your days: and if you fail in the least, you are gone for ever; "for whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all," James ii. 10. And what peace can you possibly obtain, were you as holy as ever you aimed or desired to be, whilst this is your condition? But in this way of forgiveness *we all shall stand upon the account of one common Mediator*, in whom we are "complete," Col. ii. 10. And a want of a due improvement of this truth is a great principle of disconsolation to many souls. Suppose a man look upon himself as loosed from the covenant of works, wherein exact and perfect righteousness is rigidly required, and to be called unto gospel, evangelical obedience, to be performed in the room thereof in sincerity and integrity; yet if he be not cleared in this also, that he stands not in this way purely on his own account, he will never be able to make his comforts hold out to the end of his journey. There will be found in the best of men so many particular failings, as will seem in difficult seasons to impeach their integrity; and so many questionings will after arise, through the darkness of their minds and power of their temptations, as will give but little rest unto their souls. Here lies the great security of this way,—we abide in it on the account of the faithfulness and ability of our common Mediator, Jesus Christ.

And this is another consideration, strengthening our invitation to

Digitized by Google

a closure with the way of coming unto God under proposal. There is nothing wanting that is needful to give infallible security to any soul that shall venture himself into it and upon it. There are terms of peace proposed, as you have heard. These terms are excellent, and holy, and chosen of God, tending to the interest of his glory; —free, safe, and secure unto sinners. What hath any soul in the world to object against them? or wherein do men repose their trust and confidence in the neglect of this so great salvation? Is it in their lusts and sins, that they will yield them as much satisfaction and contentment as they shall need to desire? Alas! they will ruin them, and bring forth nothing but death. Is it in the world? It will deceive them; the figure of it passeth away. Is it in their duties and righteousness? They will not relieve them; for, did they follow the law of righteousness, they could not obtain the righteousness of the law. Is it in the continuance of their lives? Alas! it is but a shadow, "a vapour that appeareth for a little while." Is it in a future amendment and repentance? Hell is full of souls perishing under such resolutions. Only this way of pardon remains; and yet of all others is most despised! But yet I have one consideration more to add before I farther enforce the exhortation.

6. Consider that *this is the only way and means to enable you unto obedience,* and to render what you do therein acceptable unto God. It may be that some of you are under the power of convictions, and have made engagements unto God to live unto him, to keep yourselves from sin, and to follow after holiness. It may be you have done so in afflictions, dangers, sicknesses, or upon receipt of mercies. But yet you find that you cannot come unto stability or constancy in your course,—you break with God and your own souls; which fills you with new disquietments, or else hardens you and makes you secure and negligent, so that you return unto your purposes no oftener than your convictions or afflictions befall you anew. This condition is ruinous and pernicious, which nothing can deliver you from but this closing with forgiveness; for,—

(1.) All that you do without this, however it may *please your minds* or ease your consciences, is not at all *accepted with God.* Unless this foundation be laid, all that you do is lost;—all your prayers, all your duties, all your amendments, are an abomination unto the Lord. Until peace is made with him, they are but the acts of enemies, which he despiseth and abhorreth. You run, it may be earnestly, but you run out of the way; you strive, but not lawfully, and shall never receive the crown. True gospel obedience is the fruit of the faith of forgiveness. Whatever you do without it is but a building without a foundation, a castle in the air. You may see the order of gospel obedience, Eph. ii. 7–10. The foundation

Digitized by Google

must be laid in grace, riches of grace by Christ,—in the free pardon and forgiveness of sin. From hence must the works of obedience proceed, if you would have them to be of God's appointment, or find acceptance with him. Without this God will say of all your services, worship, obedience, as he did to the Israelites of old, Amos v. 21–23, "I despise all, reject it all." It is not to him nor to his glory. Now, if you are under convictions of any sort, there is nothing you more value, nothing you more place your confidence in, than your duties, your repentance, your amendment, what you do, and what in good time you will be. Is it nothing unto you to lose all your hopes and all your expectations which you have from hence; to have no other reception with God than if all this while you had been wallowing in your sins and lusts? Yet thus it is with you. If you have not begun with God on his own terms, if you have not received the atonement in the blood of his Son, if you are not made partakers of forgiveness, if your persons are not pardoned, all your duties are accursed.

(2.) This alone will give you such *motives and encouragements unto obedience* as will give you life, alacrity, and delight in it. You perform duties, abstain from sins, but with heaviness, fear, and in bondage. Could you do as well without them as with them, would conscience be quiet, and hope of eternity hold out, you would omit them for ever. This makes all your obedience burdensome, and you cry out in your thoughts with him in the prophet, "Behold, what a weariness is it!" The service of God is the only drudgery of your lives, which you dare not omit, and delight not to perform. From this wretched and cursed frame there is nothing can deliver you but this closing with forgiveness. This will give you such motives, such encouragements, as will greatly influence your hearts and souls. It will give you freedom, liberty, delight, and cheerfulness, in all duties of gospel obedience. You will find a constraining power in the love of Christ therein,—a freedom from bondage, when the Son truly hath made you free. Faith and love will work genuinely and naturally in your spirits; and that which was your greatest burden will become your chiefest joy, 2 Cor. vii. 1. Thoughts of the love of God, of the blood of Christ, or of the covenant of grace, and sense of pardon in them, will enlarge your hearts and sweeten all your duties. You will find a new life, a new pleasure, a new satisfaction, in all that you do. Have you yet ever understood that of the wise man, Prov. iii. 17, "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace?" Have the ways of holiness, of obedience, of duties, been so unto you? Whatever you pretend, they are not, they cannot be so, whilst you are strangers unto that which alone can render them so unto you. I speak unto them that are under the law. Would you

Digitized by Google

be free from that bondage, that galling yoke in duties of obedience? would you have all that you do towards God a delight and pleasantness unto you? This, and this alone, will effect it for you.

(3.) This *will place all your obedience upon a sure foot of account in your own souls and consciences,* even the same that is fixed on in the gospel. For the present, all that you do is indeed but to compound with God for your sin. You hope, by what you do for him and to him, to buy off what you have done against him, that you may not fall into the hands of his wrath and vengeance. This makes all you do to be irksome. As a man that labours all his days to pay an old debt, and brings in nothing to lay up for himself, how tedious and wearisome is his work and labour to him! It is odds but that, at one time or other, he will give over and run away from his creditor. So it is in this case: men who have secret reserves of recompensing God by their obedience, every day find their debt growing upon them, and have every day less hopes of making a satisfactory payment. This makes them weary, and for the most part they faint under their discouragements, and at length they fly wholly from God. This way alone will state things otherwise in your consciences: it will give you to see that all your debts are paid by Christ, and freely forgiven unto you by God; so that what you do is of gratitude or thankfulness, hath an influence into eternity, leads to the glory of God, the honour of Christ in the gospel, and your own comfortable account at the last day. This encourageth the soul to labour, to trade, to endeavour; all things now looking forward, and unto his advantage.

(4.) Find you not in yourselves an *impotency, a disability unto the duties of obedience,* as to their performance unto God in an acceptable manner? It may be you are not so sensible hereof as you ought to be; for, respecting only or principally the outward part and performance of duties, you have not experience of your own weakness. How to enliven and fill up duties with faith, love, and delight, you know not; and are therefore unacquainted with your own insufficiency in this matter. Yet if you have any light, any convictions (and to such I speak at present), you cannot but perceive and understand that you are not able in your obedience to answer what you aim at; you have not strength or power for it. Now it is this faith of forgiveness alone that will furnish you with the ability whereof you stand in need. Pardon comes not to the soul alone, or rather, Christ comes not to the soul with pardon only; it is that which he opens the door and enters by, but he comes with a Spirit of life and power. And as "without him we can do nothing," so through his enabling us we may "do all things." Receiving of gospel forgiveness engageth all the grace of the gospel unto our assistance.

Digitized by Google

This is the sum of what hath been spoken:—The obedience that you perform under your convictions is burdensome and unpleasant unto you; it is altogether unacceptable to God. You lose all you do, and all that you hope to do hereafter, if the foundation be not laid in the receiving of pardon in the blood of Christ. It is high time to cast down all that vain and imaginary fabric which you have been erecting, and to go about the laying of a new foundation, which you may safely and cheerfully build upon,—a building that will abide for ever.

7. Again: it is such a way, so excellent, so precious, so near the heart of God, so relating to the blood of Christ, that *the neglect of it will assuredly be sorely revenged of the Lord.* Let not men think that they shall despise the wisdom and love of the Father, the blood of the Son, and the promises of the gospel, at an easy rate. Let us in a very few words take a view of what the Holy Ghost speaks to this purpose. There are three ways whereby the vengeance due to the neglect of closing with forgiveness or gospel grace is expressed:—

(1.) That is done *positively:* "He that believeth not shall be DAMNED," Mark xvi. 16. That is a hard word; many men cannot endure to hear of it. They would not have it named by their good wills, and are ready to fly in the face of him from whose mouth it proceeds. But let not men deceive themselves; this is the softest word that mercy and love itself, that Christ, that the gospel speaks to despisers of forgiveness. It is Christ who is this legal terrifying preacher; it is he that cries out, "If you believe not, you shall be damned;" and he will come himself "in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them that obey not the gospel," 2 Thess. ii. 8. This is the end of the disobedient, if God, if Christ, if the gospel may be believed.

(2.) *Comparatively,* in reference unto the vengeance due to the breach of the law, 2 Cor. ii. 16. We are in the preaching of forgiveness by Christ, unto them that perish, "a savour of death unto death," a deep death, a sore condemnation. So Heb. x. 29, "Of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy?" sorer than ever was threatened by the law, or inflicted for the breach of it,—not as to the kind of punishment but as to the degrees of it; hence ariseth the addition of "Many stripes."

(3.) By *the way of admiration at the inexpressibleness* and unavoidableness of the punishment due unto such sinners: Heb. ii. 3, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation!"—"Surely there is no way for men to escape, they shall unavoidably perish, who neglect so great salvation." So the Holy Ghost says, 1 Pet. iv. 17, "What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel?"—"What understanding can reach to an apprehension of their miserable and

Digitized by Google

woful condition?" "None can," saith the Holy Ghost, "nor can it be spoken to their capacity." Ah! what shall their end be? There remains nothing but "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries," Heb. x. 27,—a certain fearful expectation of astonishable things, that cannot be comprehended.

And these are the enforcements of the exhortation in hand which I shall insist upon. On these foundations, on the consideration of these principles, let us now a little confer together, with the words of truth and sobriety. I speak to such poor souls as, having deceived themselves, or neglected utterly their eternal condition, are not as yet really and in truth made partakers of this forgiveness. Your present state is sad and deplorable. There is nothing but the woful uncertainty of a dying life between you and eternal ruin. That persuasion you have of forgiveness is good for nothing but to harden you and destroy you. It is not the forgiveness that is with God, nor have you taken it up on gospel grounds or evidences. You have stolen painted beads, and take yourselves to be lawful possessors of pearls and jewels. As you are, then, any way concerned in your own eternal condition, which you are entering into (and how soon you shall be engaged in it you know not), prevail with yourselves to attend a little unto the exhortation that lies before you; it is your own business that you are entreated to have regard unto.

1. Consider seriously what it is *you bottom your hopes and expectation upon as to eternity.* Great men, and in other things wise, are here very apt to deceive themselves. They suppose they think and believe much otherwise than indeed they think and believe, as their cry at the last day will manifest. Put your souls a little unto it. Do you at all seriously think of these things? or are you so under the power of your lusts, ignorance, and darkness, that you neglect and despise them? or do you rise up and lie down, and perform some duties, or neglect them, with a great coldness, remissness, and indifferency of spirit, like Gallio, not much caring for these things? or do you relieve yourselves with hopes of future amendment, purposing that if you live you will be other persons than you are, when such and such things are brought about and accomplished? or do you not hope well in general upon the account of what you have done and will do? If any of these express your condition, it is unspeakably miserable. You lie down and rise up under the wrath of the great God, who will prevail at last upon you, and there shall be none to deliver.

2. If you shall say, "Nay, this is not our state; we rely on mercy and forgiveness," then let me, in the fear of the great God, entreat a few things yet farther of you:—

Digitized by Google

That you would seriously consider whether the forgiveness you rest on and hope in be that gospel forgiveness which we have before described; or is it only a general apprehension of impunity, though you are sinners,—that God is merciful, and you hope in him that you shall escape the vengeance of hell-fire? If it be thus with you, forgiveness itself will not relieve you. This is that of the presumptuous man, Deut. xxix. 19. Gospel pardon is a thing of another nature; it hath its spring in the gracious heart of the Father, is made out by a sovereign act of his will, rendered consistent with the glory of his justice and holiness by the blood of Christ, by which it is purchased in a covenant of grace; as hath been showed. If you shall say, "Yea, this is the forgiveness we rely upon, it is that which you have described," then I desire farther that you would,—

(1.) Examine your own hearts, *how you came to have an interest in this forgiveness*, to close with it, and to have a right unto it. A man may deceive himself as effectually by supposing that true riches are his, when they are not, as by supposing his false and counterfeit ware to be good and current. How, then, came you to be interested in this gospel forgiveness? If it hath befallen you you know not how,—if a lifeless, barren, inoperative persuasion of it hath crept upon your minds,—be not mistaken, God will come and require his forgiveness at your hands, and it shall appear that you have had no part nor portion in it. If you shall say, "Nay, but we were convinced of sin, and rendered exceeding unquiet in our consciences, and on that account looked out after forgiveness, which hath given us rest," then I desire,—

(2.) That you would diligently consider to *what ends and purposes you have received, and do make use of, this gospel forgiveness.* Hath it been to make up what was wanting, and to piece up a peace in your own consciences? that whereas you could not answer your convictions with your duties, you would seek for relief from forgiveness? This and innumerable other ways there are whereby men may lose their souls when they think all is well with them, even on the account of pardon and mercy. Whence is that caution of the apostle, "Looking diligently lest any one should seem to fail," or come short, "of the grace of God," Heb. xii. 15. Men miss it and come short of it when they pretend themselves to be in the pursuit of it, yea, to have overtaken and possessed it. Now, if any of these should prove to be your condition, I desire,—

(3.) That you would consider seriously *whether it be not high time for you to look out for a way of deliverance and escape, that you may save yourselves from this evil world, and flee from the wrath to come.* The Judge stands at the door. Before he deal with you as a judge, he knocks with a tender of mercy. Who knows but that this

Digitized by Google

may be the last time of his dealing thus with you. Be you old or young, you have but your season, but your day. It may, perhaps, be night with you when it is day with the rest of the world. Your sun may go down at noon; and God may swear that you shall not enter into his rest. If you are, then, resolved to continue in your present condition, I have no more to say unto you. I am pure from your blood, in that I have declared unto you the counsel of God in this thing; and so I must leave you to a naked trial between the great God and your souls at the last day. Poor creatures! I even tremble to think how he will tear you in pieces when there shall be none to deliver. Methinks I see your poor, destitute, forlorn souls, forsaken of lusts, sins, world, friends, angels, men, trembling before the throne of God, full of horror and fearful expectation of the dreadful sentence. Oh, that I could mourn over you, whilst you are joined to all the living, whilst there is but hope! oh, that in this your day you knew the things of your peace!

But now if you shall say, "Nay, but we will 'seek the LORD whilst he may be found,' we will draw nigh unto him before he cause darkness," then,—

(4.) Consider, I pray, *what Joshua told the children of Israel*, when they put themselves upon such a resolution, and cried out, "We will serve the LORD, for he is our God:" chap. xxiv. 19, "Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he is an holy God, a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins." Go to him upon your own account, and in your own strength, with your own best endeavours and duties, you will find him too great and too holy for you to deal withal. You will obtain neither acceptance of your persons nor pardon of your sins. But you will say, "This is heavy tidings, 'If you sit still you perish, and if you rise to be doing, it will not be better.' Is there no hope left for our souls? Must we pine away under our sins and the wrath of God for ever?" God forbid. There are yet other directions remaining to guide you out of these entanglements. Wherefore,—

(5.) *Ponder seriously on what hath been spoken of this way of approaching unto God.* Consider it in its own nature, as to all the ends and purposes for which it is proposed of God; consider whether you approve of it or no. Do you judge it a way suited and fitted to bring glory unto God? Doth it answer all the wants and distresses of your souls? Do you think it excellent, safe, and glorious unto them who are entered into it? or have you any thing to object against it? Return your answer to him in whose name and by whose appointment these words are spoken unto you. If you shall say, "We are convinced that this way of forgiveness is the only way for the relief and deliverance of souls," then,—

Digitized by Google

(6.) *Abhor yourselves for all your blindness and obstinacy,* whereby you have hitherto despised the love of God, the blood of Christ, and the tenders of pardon in the gospel. Be abased and humbled to the dust in a sense of your vileness, pollutions, and abominations; which things are every day spoken unto, and need not here be repeated. And,—

(7.) *Labour to exercise your hearts greatly with thoughts of that abundant grace that is manifested in this way of sinners coming unto God,* as also of the excellency of the gospel wherein it is unfolded. Consider the eternal love of the Father, which is the fountain and spring of this whole dispensation,—the inexpressible love of the Son in establishing and confirming it, in removing all hinderances and obstructions by his own blood, bringing forth unto beauty and glory this redemption or forgiveness of sin at the price of it. And let the glory of the gospel, which alone makes this discovery of forgiveness in God, dwell in your hearts. Let your minds be exercised about these things. You will find effects from them above all that hath as yet been brought forth in your souls. What, for the most part, have you hitherto been conversant about? When you have risen above the turmoiling of lusts and corruptions in your hearts, the entanglements of your callings, business, and affairs, what have you been able to raise your hearts unto? Perplexing fears about your condition, general hopes, without savour or relish, yielding you no refreshment, legal commands, bondage duties, distracted consciences, broken purposes and promises, which you have been tossed up and down withal, without any certain rest. And what effects have these thoughts produced? Have they made you more holy and more humble? Have they given you delight in God, and strength unto new obedience? Not at all. Where you were, there you still are, without the least progress. But now bring your souls unto these springs, and try the Lord if from that day you be not blessed with spiritual stores.

(8.) If the Lord be pleased to carry on your souls thus far, then *stir up yourselves to choose and close with the way of forgiveness* that hath been revealed. Choose it only, choose it in comparison with and opposition unto all others. Say you will be for Christ, and not for another; and be so accordingly. Here venture, here repose, here rest your souls. It is a way of peace, safety, holiness, beauty, strength, power, liberty, and glory. You have the nature, the name, the love, the purposes, the promises, the covenant, the oath of God; the love, life, death or blood, the mediation, or oblation and intercession of Jesus Christ; the power and efficacy of the Spirit, and gospel grace by him administered,—to give you assurance of the excellency, the oneness, the safety of the way whereunto you are engaging.

Digitized by Google

If now the Lord shall be pleased to persuade your hearts and souls to enter upon the path marked out before you, and shall carry you on through the various exercises of it unto this closure of faith, God will have the glory, the gospel will be exalted, and your own souls shall reap the eternal benefit of this exhortation.

But now if, notwithstanding all that hath been spoken, all the invitations you have had, and encouragements that have been held out unto you, you shall continue to despise this so great salvation, you will live and die in the state and condition wherein you are. Why, then, as the prophet said to the wife of Jeroboam, "Come near, for I am sent to you with heavy tidings." I say, then,—

(9.) If you resolve to *continue in the neglect of this salvation, and shall do so accordingly, then cursed be you of the Lord*, with all the curses that are written in the law, and all the curses that are denounced against despisers of the gospel. Yea, be you Anathema Maran-atha,—cursed in this world always, until the coming of the Lord; and when the Lord comes, be ye cursed from his presence into everlasting destruction. Yea, curse them, all ye holy angels of God, as the obstinate enemies of your king and head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Curse them, all ye churches of Christ, as despisers of that love and mercy which is your portion, your life, your inheritance. Let all the saints of God, all that love the Lord, curse them, and rejoice to see the Lord coming forth mightily and prevailing against them, to their everlasting ruin. Why should any one have a thought of compassion towards them who despise the compassion of God, or of mercy towards them who trample on the blood of Christ? Whilst there is yet hope, we desire to have continual sorrow for you, and to travail in soul for your conversion to God; but if you be hardened in your way, shall we join with you against him? shall we prefer you above his glory? shall we desire your salvation with the despoiling God of his honour? Nay, God forbid. We hope to rejoice in seeing all that vengeance and indignation that is in the right hand of God poured out unto eternity upon your souls, Prov. i. 24–33.

Rules to be observed by them who would come to stability in obedience.

THAT which remaineth to be farther carried on, upon the principles laid down, is to persuade with souls more or less entangled in the depths of sin to close with this forgiveness by believing, unto their peace and consolation. And because such persons are full of pleas and objections against themselves, I shall chiefly, in what I have

Digitized by Google

to say, endeavour to obviate these objections, so to encourage them unto believing and bring them unto settlement. And herein whatever I have to offer flows naturally from the doctrine at large laid down and asserted. Yet I shall not in all particulars apply myself thereunto, but in general fix on those things that may tend to the establishment and consolation of both distressed and doubting souls. And I shall do what I purpose these two ways:—

FIRST, I shall lay down such general rules as are necessary to be observed by all those who intend to come to gospel peace and comfort. And then, SECONDLY, shall consider some such objections as seem to be most comprehensive of those special reasonings wherewith distressed persons do usually entangle themselves.

I shall begin with general rules, which, through the grace of Christ and supplies of his Spirit, may be of use unto believers in the condition under consideration.

RULE I.

Christ the only infallible judge of our spiritual condition—How he judgeth by his word and Spirit.

Be not judges of your own condition, but let Christ judge. You are invited to take the comfort of this gospel truth, that "there is forgiveness with God." You say, not for you. So said Jacob, "My way is hid from the LORD," Isa. xl. 27; and Zion said so too, chap. xlix. 14, "The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." But did they make a right judgment of themselves? We find in those places that God was otherwise minded. This false judgment, made by souls in their entanglements, of their own condition, is oftimes a most unconquerable hinderance unto the bettering of it. They fill themselves with thoughts of their own about it, and on them they dwell, instead of looking out after a remedy. Misgiving thoughts of their distempers are commonly a great part of some men's sickness. Many diseases are apt to cloud the thoughts, and to cause misapprehensions concerning their own nature and danger. And these delusions are a real part of the person's sickness. Nature is no less impaired and weakened by them, the efficacy of remedies no less obstructed, than by any other real distemper. In such cases we persuade men to acquiesce in the judgment of their skilful physician; not always to be wasting themselves in and by their own tainted imaginations, and so despond upon their own mistakes, but to rest in what is informed them by him who is acquainted with the causes and tendency of their indisposition better than themselves. It is ofttimes

Digitized by Google

one part of the soul's depths to have false apprehensions of its condition. Sin is a madness, Eccles. ix. 3; so far as any one is under the power of it, he is under the power of madness. Madness doth not sooner nor more effectually discover itself in any way or thing than in possessing them in whom it is with strange conceits and apprehensions of themselves. So doth this madness of sin, according unto its degrees and prevalency. Hence some cry, "Peace, peace," when "sudden destruction is at hand," 1 Thess. v. 3. It is that madness, under whose power they are, which gives them such groundless imaginations of themselves and their own condition. And some say they are lost for ever, when God is with them.

Do you, then, your duty, and let Christ judge of your state. Your concernment is too great to make it a reasonable demand to commit the judgment of your condition to any other. When eternal welfare or woe are at the stake, for a man to renounce his own thoughts, to give up himself implicitly to the judgment of men fallible and liars like himself, is stupidity. But there is no danger of being deceived by the sentence of Christ. The truth is, whether we will or no, he will judge; and according as he determines, so shall things be found at the last day: John v. 22, "The Father judgeth no man" (that is, immediately and in his own person), "but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." All judgment that respects eternity, whether it be to be passed in this world or in that to come, is committed unto him. Accordingly in that place he judgeth both of things and persons. Things he determines upon, verse 24, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." Let men say what they please, this sentence shall stand; faith and eternal life are inseparably conjoined. And so of persons, verse 38, "Ye have not" (saith he to the Pharisees, who were much otherwise minded) "the word of God abiding in you."

Take not, then, the office and prerogative of Christ out of his hand, by making a judgment, upon your own reasonings and conclusions and deductions, of your estate and condition. You will find that he oftentimes, both on the one hand and on the other, determines quite contrary to what men judge of themselves, as also to what others judge of them. Some he judgeth to be in an evil condition, who are very confident that it is well with them, and who please themselves in the thoughts of many to the same purpose. And he judgeth the state of some to be good, who are diffident in themselves, and, it may be, despised by others. We may single out an example or two in each kind:—

1. Laodicea's judgment of herself and her spiritual state we have,

Digitized by Google

Rev. iii. 17: "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." A fair state it seems, a blessed condition! She wants nothing that may contribute to her rest, peace, and reputation: she is orthodox, and numerous, and flourishing; makes a fair profession, and all is well within! So she believes, so she reports of herself; wherein there is a secret reflection also upon others whom she despiseth: "Let them shift as they list, I am thus as I say." But was it so with her indeed? was that her true condition, whereof she was so persuaded as to profess it unto all? Let Jesus Christ be heard to speak in this cause, let him come and judge. "I will do so," saith he: verse 14, "Thus saith the Amen, the faithful and true Witness." Coming to give sentence in a case of this importance, he gives himself this title, that we may know his word is to be acquiesced in. "Every man," saith he, "is a liar; their testimony is of no value, let them pronounce what they will of themselves or of one another, 'I am the Amen,' and I will see whose word shall stand, mine or theirs." What, then, saith he of Laodicea? "Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Oh, woful and sad disappointment! Oh, dreadful surprisal! Ah! how many Laodicean churches have we in the world! how many professors are members of these churches! not to mention the generality of men that live under the means of grace; all which have good hopes of their eternal condition, whilst they are despised and abhorred by the only Judge. Among professors themselves, it is dreadful to think how many will be found light when they come to be weighed in this balance.

2. Again: he judgeth *some to be in a good condition*, be they themselves never so *diffident*. Rev. ii. 9, saith he to the church of Smyrna, "I know thy poverty." Smyrna was complaining that she was a poor, contemptible congregation, not fit for him to take any notice of. "Well," saith he, "fear not. 'I know thy poverty,' whereof thou complainest; 'but thou art rich.' That is my judgment, testimony, and sentence, concerning thee and thy condition." Such will be his judgment at the last day, when both those on the one hand and on the other shall be surprised with his sentence,—the one with joy at the riches of his grace, the other with terror at the severity of his justice, Matt. xxv. 37–40, 44, 45. This case is directly stated in both the places mentioned in the entrance of this discourse; as in that, for instance, Isa. xlix. 14, "Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me." That is Zion's judgment of herself, and her state and condition; a sad report and conclusion. But doth Christ agree with Zion in this sentence? The next verse gives us his resolution of this matter: "Can," saith he, "a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." The state of things, in

Digitized by Google

truth, is as much otherwise as can possibly be thought or imagined.

To what purpose is it for men to be passing a judgment upon themselves, when there is no manner of certainty in their determinations, and when their proceeding thereon will probably lead them to farther entanglements, if not to eternal ruin? The judging of souls, as to their spiritual state and condition, is the work of Jesus Christ, especially as to the end now under inquiry. Men may, men do, take many ways to make a judgment of themselves. Some do it on slight and trivial conjectures; some on bold and wicked presumptions; some on desperate atheistical notions, as Deut. xxix. 19; some, with more sobriety and sense of eternity, lay down principles that may be good and true in themselves, from them they draw conclusions, arguing from one thing unto another, and in the end ofttimes either deceive themselves, or sit down no less in the dark than they were at the entrance of their self-debate and examination. A man's judgment upon his own reasonings is seldom true, more seldom permanent. I speak not of self-examination, with a due discussion of graces and actions, but of the final sentence as to state and condition, wherein the soul is to acquiesce. This belongs unto Christ.

Now, there are two ways whereby the Lord Jesus Christ gives forth his decretory sentence in this matter:—

(1.) *By his word.* He determines, in the word of the gospel, of the state and condition of all men indefinitely. Each individual coming to that word receives his own sentence and doom. He told the Jews that Moses accused them, John v. 45. His law accused and condemned the transgressors of it. And so doth he acquit every one that is discharged by the word of the gospel. And our self-judging is but our receiving by faith his sentence in the word. His process herein we have recorded: Job xxxiii. 22, 23, "His soul" (that is, of the sinner) "draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers." This seems to be his state; it is so indeed: he is at the very brink of the grave and hell. What then? Why, if there be with him or stand over him מַלְאָךְ מֵלִיץ, the angel interpreting, or the angel of the covenant, who alone is אֶחָד מִנִּי־אָלֶף, the "one of a thousand," what shall he do? "He shall shew unto him his uprightness." He shall give unto him a right determination of his interest in God, and of the state and frame of his heart towards God; whereupon God shall speak peace unto his soul, and deliver him from his entanglements, verse 24. Jesus Christ hath, in the word of the gospel, stated the condition of every man. He tells us that sinners, of what sort soever they are, that believe, are accepted with him, and shall receive forgiveness from God,—that none shall be refused or cast off that

Digitized by Google

come unto God by him. The soul of whom we are treating is now upon the work of coming unto God for forgiveness by Jesus Christ. Many and weighty objections it hath in and against itself why it should not come, why it shall not be accepted. Our Lord Jesus, the wisdom of God, foresaw all these objections, he foreknew what could be said in the case, and yet he hath determined the matter as hath been declared. In general, men's arguings against themselves arise from sin and the law. Christ knows what is in them both. He tried them to the uttermost, as to their penalties, and yet he hath so determined as we have showed. Their particular objections are from particular considerations of sin,—their greatness, their number, their aggravations. Christ knows all these also, and yet stands to his former determination. Upon the whole matter, then, it is meet his word should stand. I know, when a soul brings itself to be judged by the word of the gospel, it doth not always in a like manner receive and rest in the sentence given. But when Christ is pleased to speak the word with power to men, they shall "hear the voice of the Son of God," and be concluded by it. Let the soul, then, that is rising out of depths and pressing towards a sense of forgiveness, lay itself down before the word of Christ in the gospel. Let him attend to what he speaks; and if for a while it hath not power upon him to quiet his heart, let him wait a season, and light shall arise unto him out of darkness. Christ will give in his sentence into his conscience with that power and efficacy as he shall find rest and peace in it.

(2.) Christ also judgeth *by his Spirit*, not only in making this sentence of the gospel to be received effectually in the soul, but in and by *peculiar actings* of his upon the heart and soul of a believer: 1 Cor. ii. 12, "We have received the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." The Spirit of Christ acquaints the soul that this and that grace is from him, that this or that duty was performed in his strength. He brings to mind what at such and such times was wrought in men by himself, to give them supportment and relief in the times of depths and darkness. And when it hath been clearly discovered unto the soul at any time by the Holy Ghost, that any thing wrought in it or done by it hath been truly saving, the comfort of it will abide in the midst of many shakings and temptations.

3. He also by his Spirit *bears witness with our spirits* as to our state and condition. Of this I have spoken largely elsewhere, and therefore shall now pass it by.

This, then, is our first general rule and direction:—Self-determinations concerning men's spiritual state and condition, because their minds are usually influenced by their distempers, are seldom right and according to rule; mistakes in such determinations are exceed-

Digitized by Google

ingly prejudicial to a soul seeking out after relief and sense of forgiveness: let Christ, then, be the judge in this case by his word and Spirit, as hath been directed.

Rule II.

Self-condemnation and abhorrency for sin consistent with gospel justification and peace—The nature of gospel assurance—What is consistent with it—What are the effects of it.

Self-condemnation and abhorrency do very well consist with gospel justification and peace. Some men have no peace, because they have that without which it is impossible they should have peace. Because they cannot but condemn themselves, they cannot entertain a sense that God doth acquit them. But this is the mystery of the gospel, which unbelief is a stranger unto; nothing but faith can give a real subsistence unto these things in the same soul, at the same time. It is easy to learn the notion of it, but it is not easy to experience the power of it. For a man to have a sight of that within him which would condemn him, for which he is troubled, and at the same time to have a discovery of that without him which will justify him, and to rejoice therein, is that which he is not led unto but by faith in the mystery of the gospel. We are now under a law for justification which excludes all boasting, Rom. iii. 27; so that though we have joy enough in another, yet we may have, we always have, sufficient cause of humiliation in ourselves. The gospel will teach a man to feel sin and believe righteousness at the same time. Faith will carry heaven in one hand and hell in the other; showing the one deserved, the other purchased. A man may see enough of his own sin and folly to bring "gehennam è cœlo,"—a hell of wrath out of heaven; and yet see Christ bring "cœlum ex inferno,"—a heaven of blessedness out of a hell of punishment. And these must needs produce very divers, yea, contrary effects and operations in the soul; and he who knows not how to assign them their proper duties and seasons must needs be perplexed. The work of self-condemnation, then, which men in these depths cannot but abound with, is, in the disposition of the covenant of grace, no way inconsistent with nor unsuited unto justification and the enjoyment of peace in the sense of it. There may be a deep sense of sin on other considerations besides hell. David was never more humbled for sin than when Nathan told him it was forgiven. And there may be a view of hell as deserved, which yet the soul may know itself freed from as to the issue.

Digitized by Google

To evidence our intendment in this discourse, I shall briefly consider what we intend by gospel assurance of forgiveness, that the soul may not be solicitous and perplexed about the utter want of that which, perhaps, it is already in some enjoyment of.

Some men seem to place gospel assurance in a high, unassaulted confidence of acceptance with God. They think it is in none but such as, if a man should go to them and ask them, "Are you certain you shall be saved?" have boldness, and confidence, and ostentation to answer presently, "Yea, they are certain they shall be saved." But as the blessed truth of assurance hath been reproached in the world under such a notion of it, so such expressions become not them who know what it is to have to do with the holy God, who is "a consuming fire." Hence some conclude that there are very few believers who have any assurance, because they have not this confidence, or are more free to mention the opposition they meet with than the supportment they enjoy. And thus it is rendered a matter not greatly to be desired, because it is so rarely to be obtained, most of the saints serving God and going to heaven well enough without it. But the matter is otherwise. The importance of it, not only as it is our life of comfort and joy, but also as it is the principal means of the flourishing of our life of holiness, hath been declared before, and might be farther manifested, were that our present business; yea, and in times of trial, which are the proper seasons for the effectual working and manifestation of assurance, it will and doth appear that many, yea, that most of the saints of God are made partakers of this grace and privilege.

I shall, then, in the pursuit of the rule laid down, do these two things:—1. Show what things they are which are not only *consistent with* assurance, but are even *necessary concomitants* of it; which yet, if not duly weighed and considered, may seem so far to impeach a man's comfortable persuasion of his condition before God as to leave him beneath the assurance sought after. And,—2. I shall speak somewhat of its *nature*, especially as manifesting itself by its effects.

1. (1.) A *deep sense of the evil of sin*, of the guilt of man's own sin, is no way inconsistent with gospel assurance of acceptance with God through Christ, and of forgiveness in him. By a sense of the guilt of sin I understand two things:—First, A clear conviction of sin, by the Holy Ghost saying unto the soul, "Thou art the man;" and, Secondly, A sense of the displeasure of God, or the wrath due to sin, according to the sentence of the law. Both these David expresseth in that complaint, Ps. xxxi. 10, "My life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed." His iniquity was before him, and a sense of it pressed him sore. But yet, notwithstanding all this, he

Digitized by Google

had a comfortable persuasion that God was his God in covenant: verse 14, "I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God." And the tenor of the covenant, wherein alone God is the God of any person, is, that he will be merciful unto their sin and iniquity. To whom he is a God, he is so according to the tenor of that covenant; so that here these two are conjoined. Saith he, "Lord, I am pressed with the sense of the guilt of mine iniquities; and thou art my God, who forgivest them." And the ground hereof is, that God by the gospel hath divided the work of the law, and taken part of it out of its hand. Its whole work and duty is, to condemn the sin and the sinner. The sinner is freed by the gospel, but its right lies against the sin still; that it condemns, and that justly. Now, though the sinner himself be freed, yet finding his sin laid hold of and condemned, it fills him with a deep sense of its guilt and of the displeasure of God against it; which yet hinders not but that, at the same time, he may have such an insight as faith gives into his personal interest in a gospel acquitment. A man, then, may have a deep sense of sin all his days, walk under the sense of it continually, abhor himself for his ingratitude, unbelief, and rebellion against God, without any impeachment of his assurance.

(2.) *Deep sorrow for sin* is consistent with assurance of forgiveness; yea, it is a great means of preservation of it. Godly sorrow, mourning, humiliation, contriteness of spirit, are no less gospel graces and fruits of the Holy Ghost than faith itself, and so are consistent with the highest flourishings of faith whatever. It is the work of heaven itself, and not of the assurance of it, to wipe all tears from our eyes. Yea, these graces have the most eminent promises annexed to them, as Isa. lvii. 15, lxvi. 2, with blessedness itself, Matt. v. 4; yea, they are themselves the matter of many gracious gospel promises, Zech. xii. 10: so that they are assuredly consistent with any other grace or privilege that we may be made partakers of, or [any that] are promised unto us. Some, finding the weight and burden of their sins, and being called to mourning and humiliation on that account, are so taken up with it as to lose the sense of forgiveness, which, rightly improved, would promote their sorrow, as their sorrow seems directly to sweeten their sense of forgiveness. Sorrow, absolutely exclusive of the faith of forgiveness, is legal, and tendeth unto death; assurance, absolutely exclusive of godly sorrow, is presumption, and not a persuasion from Him that calleth us: but gospel sorrow and gospel assurance may well dwell in the same breast at the same time. Indeed, as in all worldly joys there is a secret wound, so in all godly sorrow and mourning, considered in itself, there is a secret joy and refreshment; hence it doth not wither and dry up, but rather enlarge, open, and sweeten the heart. I am per-

Digitized by Google

suaded that, generally, they mourn most who have most assurance. And all true gospel mourners will be found to have the root of assurance so grafted in them, that in its proper season,—a time of trouble,—it will undoubtedly flourish.

(3.) *A deep sense of the indwelling power of sin* is consistent with gospel assurance. Sense of indwelling sin will cause manifold perplexities in the soul. Trouble, disquietments, sorrow and anguish of heart, expressing themselves in sighs, mourning, groaning for deliverance, always attend it. To what purpose do you speak to a soul highly sensible of the restless power of indwelling sin concerning assurance? "Alas," saith he, "I am ready to perish every moment. My lusts are strong, active, restless, yea, outrageous; they give me no rest, no liberty, and but little success do I obtain. Assurance is for conquerors, for them that live at rest and peace. I lie grovelling on the ground all my days, and must needs be uncertain what will be the issue." But when such a one hath done all he can, he will not be able to make more woful complaints of this matter than Paul hath done before him, Rom. vii.; and yet he closeth the discourse of it with as high an expression of assurance as any person needs to seek after, verse 25, and chap. viii. 1. It is not assurance but enjoyment that excludes this sense and trouble. But if men will think they can have no assurance because they have that without which it is impossible they should have any, it is hard to give them relief. A little cruse of salt of the gospel cast into these bitter waters will make them sweet and wholesome. Sense of the guilt of sin may consist with faith of its pardon and forgiveness in the blood of Christ. Godly sorrow may dwell in the same heart, at the same time, with joy in the Holy Ghost, and groaning after deliverance from the power of sin with a gracious persuasion that "sin shall not have dominion over us, because we are not under the law, but under grace."

(4.) *Doubtings, fears, temptations, if not ordinarily prevailing, are consistent with gospel assurance.* Though the devil's power be limited in reference unto the saints, yet his hands are not tied; though he cannot prevail against them, yet he can assault them. And although there be not "an evil heart of unbelief" in believers, yet there will still be unbelief in their hearts. Such an evidence, conviction, and persuasion of acceptance with God as are exclusive of all contrary reasonings, that suffer the soul to hear nothing of objections, that free and quiet it from all assaults, are neither mentioned in the Scripture, nor consistent with that state wherein we walk before God, nor possible on the account of Satan's will and ability to tempt, or of our own remaining unbelief. Assurance encourageth us in our combat; it delivereth us not from it. We may have peace with God when we have none from the assaults of Satan.

Digitized by Google

Now, unless a man do duly consider the tenor of the covenant wherein we walk with God, and the nature of that gospel obedience which he requires at our hands, with the state and condition which is our lot and portion whilst we live in this world, the daily sense of these things, with the trouble that must be undergone on their account, may keep him in the dark unto himself, and hinder him from that establishment in believing which otherwise he might attain unto. On this account, some as holy persons as any in this world, being wholly taken up with the consideration of these home-bred perplexities, and not clearly acquainted with the way and tenor of assuring their souls before God according to the rule of the covenant of grace, have passed away their days in a bondage-frame of spirit, and unacquaintance with that strong consolation which God is abundantly willing that all the heirs of promise should receive.

2. *Evangelical assurance is not a thing that consisteth in any point, and so incapable of variation.* It may be higher or lower, greater or less, obscure or attended with more evidence. It is not quite lost when it is not quite at its highest. God sometimes marvellously raiseth the souls of his saints with some close and near approaches unto them,—gives them a sense of his eternal love, a taste of the embraces of his Son and the inhabitation of the Spirit, without the least intervening disturbance; then this is their assurance. But this life is not a season to be always taking wages in; our work is not yet done; we are not always to abide in this mount; we must down again into the battle,—fight again, cry again, complain again. Shall the soul be thought now to have lost its assurance? Not at all. It had before assurance with joy, triumph, and exultation; it hath it now, or may have, with wrestling, cries, tears, and supplications. And a man's assurance may be as good, as true, when he lies on the earth with a sense of sin, as when he is carried up to the third heaven with a sense of love and foretaste of glory. In brief, this assurance of salvation is such a gracious, evangelical persuasion of acceptance with God in Christ, and of an interest in the promises of preservation unto the end, wrought in believers by the Holy Ghost, in and through the exercise of faith, as for the most part produceth these effects following:—

(1.) It *gives delight in obedience,* and draws out love in the duties that unto God we do perform. So much assurance of a comfortable issue of their obedience, of a blessed end of their labours and duties, of their purifying their hearts, and pressing after universal renovation of mind and life, as may make them cheerful in them, as may give love and delight in the pursuit of what they are engaged in, is needful for the saints, and they do not often go without it; and where this is, there is gospel assurance. To run as men uncertain, to fight

Digitized by Google

as those that beat the air, to travel as not any way persuaded of a comfortable entertainment or refreshment at the journey's end, is a state and condition that God doth not frequently leave his people unto; and when he doth, it is a season wherein he receives very little of glory from them, and they very little increase of grace in themselves. Many things, as hath been showed, do interpose,—many doubts arise and entangling perplexities; but still there is a comfortable persuasion kept alive that there is a rest provided, which makes them willing unto, and cheerful in, their most difficult duties. This prevaileth in them, that their labour in the Lord, their watchings, praying, suffering, alms, mortification, fighting against temptation, crucifying the flesh with the lusts thereof, shall not be in vain. This gives them such a delight in their most difficult duties as men have in a hard journey towards a desirable home or a place of rest.

(2.) It *casts out fear*, tormenting fear, such as fills the soul with perplexing uncertainties, hard thoughts of God, and dreadful apprehensions of wrath to come. There are three things spoken concerning that fear which is inconsistent with the assurance of forgiveness:—First, With respect unto its *principle*, it is from a "spirit of bondage:" Rom. viii. 15, "We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear." It is not such a fear as makes an occasional incursion upon the mind or soul, such as is excited and occasioned by incident darkness and temptation, such as the best, and persons of the highest assurance, are liable and obnoxious unto; but it is such as hath a complete abiding principle in the soul, even a "spirit of bondage,"—a prevailing frame constantly inclining it to fear, or dreadful apprehensions of God and its own condition. Secondly, That *it tends to bondage*. It brings the soul into bondage: Heb. ii. 14, 15, he died "to deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Fear of death as penal, as it lies in the curse, which is that fear that proceeds from a "spirit of bondage," brings the persons in whom it is into bondage; that is, it adds weariness, trouble, and anxiety of mind unto fear, and puts them upon all ways and means imaginable, unduly and disorderly, to seek for a remedy or relief. Thirdly, *It hath torment:* "Fear hath torment," 1 John iv. 18. It gives no rest, no quietness, unto the mind. Now, this is so cast out by gospel assurance of forgiveness, that, though it may assault the soul, it shall not possess it; though it make incursions upon it, it shall not dwell, abide, and prevail in it.

(3.) *It gives the soul a hope and expectation of "the glory that shall be revealed,"* and secretly stirs it up and enlivens it unto a supportment in sufferings, trials, and temptations. This is the "hope which maketh not ashamed," Rom. v. 5, and that because it will never expose the soul unto disappointment. Wherever there is *the root of*

Digitized by Google

assurance, there will be *this fruit of hope*. The proper object of it is things absent, invisible, eternal,—the promised reward, in all the notions, respects, and concernments of it. This *hope* goes out unto, in distresses, temptations, failings, and under a sense of the guilt and power of sin. Hence ariseth a spring of secret relief in the soul, something that calms the heart and quiets the spirit in the midst of many a storm. Now, as, wherever assurance is, there will be this hope; so wherever this secret relieving hope is, it grows on no other root but a living persuasion of a personal interest in the things hoped for.

(4.) As it will do many other things, so, that I may give one comprehensive instance, it will carry them out, in whom it is, to die for Christ. Death, unto men who saw not one step beyond it, was esteemed of all things most terrible. The way and means of its approach add unto its terror. But this is nothing in comparison of what it is unto them who look through it as a passage into ensuing eternity. For a man, then, to choose death rather than life, in the most terrible manner of its approach, expecting an eternity to ensue, it argues a comfortable persuasion of a good state and condition after death. Now, I am persuaded that there are hundreds who, upon gospel, saving accounts, would embrace a stake for the testimony of Jesus, who yet know not at all that they have the assurance we speak of; and yet nothing else would enable them thereunto. But these things being beside the main of my intendment, I shall pursue them no farther; only, the rule is of use:—Let the soul be sure to be well acquainted with the nature of that which it seeks after, and confesseth a sense of the want of.

Rule III.

Continuance in waiting necessary unto peace and consolation.

Whatever your condition be, and your apprehension of it, yet continue waiting for a better issue, and give not over through weariness or impatience. This rule contains the sum of the great example given us in this psalm. Forgiveness in God being discovered, though no sense of a particular interest therein as yet obtained, that which the soul applies itself unto is diligent, careful, constant, persevering *waiting;* which is variously expressed in the fifth and sixth verses. The Holy Ghost tells us that "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart," Ps. xcvii. 11. Light

Digitized by Google

and gladness are the things now inquired after. Deliverance from darkness, misapprehensions of God, hard and misgiving thoughts of his own condition, is that which a soul in its depths reacheth towards. Now, saith the Holy Ghost, "These things are sown for the righteous." Doth the husbandman, after he casts his seed into the earth, immediately the next day, the next week, expect that it will be harvest? doth he think to reap so soon as he hath sown? or doth he immediately say, "I have laboured in vain, here is no return; I will pull up the hedge of this field and lay it waste?" or, "I see a little grass in the blade, but no corn; I will give it to the beasts to devour it?" No; "his God," as the prophet speaks, "doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him,"—namely, what he must do, and how he must look for things in their season. And shall not we be instructed by him? "Behold, the husbandman," saith James, "waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain," James v. 7. And is light sown for them that are in darkness, and shall they stifle the seed under the clods, or spoil the tender blade that is springing up, or refuse to wait for the watering of the Spirit, that may bring it forth to perfection? Waiting is the only way to establishment and assurance; we cannot speed by our haste; yea, nothing puts the end so far away as making too much haste and speed in our journey. The ground hereof is, that a sense of a special interest in forgiveness and acceptance is given in to the soul by a mere act of sovereignty. It is not, it will not be, obtained by or upon any rational conclusions or deductions that we can make. All that we can do is but to apply ourselves to the removal of hinderances, for the peace and rest sought for come from mere prerogative: "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him?" Job xxxiv. 29. Now, what is the way to receive that which comes from mere sovereignty and prerogative? Doth not the nature of the thing require humble waiting? If, then, either impatience cast the soul into frowardness, or weariness make it slothful (which are the two ways whereby waiting is ruined), let not such a one expect any comfortable issue of his contending for deliverance out of his depths. And let not any think to make out their difficulties any other way: their own reasonings will not bring them to any establishing conclusion; for they may lay down propositions, and have no considerable objections to lie against either of them, and yet be far enough from that sweet consolation, joy, and assurance which is the product of the conclusion, when God is not pleased to give it in. Yea, a man may sometimes gather up consolation to himself upon such terms, but it will not abide. So did David, Ps. xxx. 6, 7. He thus argues with himself: "He whose mountain is made strong, to whom God is

Digitized by Google

a defence, he shall never be moved nor be shaken; but I am thus settled of God: therefore I shall not be moved." And therein he rejoiceth. It is an expression of exultation that he useth; but what is the issue of it? In the midst of these pleasing thoughts of his, "God hides his face," and "he is troubled;" he cannot any longer draw out the sweetness of the conclusion mentioned. It was in him before from the shinings of God's countenance, and not from any arguings of his own.

No disappointment, then, no tediousness or weariness, should make the soul leave waiting on God, if it intend to attain consolation and establishment. So dealeth the church, Lam. iii. 21, "This I recall to mind, therefore have I hope." What is that she calls to mind? This, that "it is of the LORD'S mercy that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not," verse 22;—"I will yet hope, I will yet continue in my expectation upon the account of never-failing compassion, of endless mercies in him, whatever my present condition be." And thence she makes a blessed conclusion, verse 26, "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD." And this is our third rule:—It is good to hope and wait, whatever our present condition be, and not to give over, if we would not be sure to fail; whereunto I speak no more, because the close of this psalm insists wholly on this duty, which must be farther spoken unto.

RULE IV.

Remove the hinderances of believing by a searching out of sin—Rules and directions for that duty.

Seeing, in the course of our believing and obedience, that which is chiefly incumbent on us, for our coming up to establishment and consolation, is spiritual diligence in the removal of the hinderances thereof, let the soul that would attain thereunto *make thorough work in the search of sin, even to the sins of youth,* that all scores on that account may clearly be wiped out. If there be much rubbish left in the foundation of the building, no wonder if it always shake and totter. Men's leaving of any sin unsearched to the bottom will poison all their consolation. David knew this when, in dealing with God in his distresses, he prays that he would not "remember the sins and transgressions of his youth," Ps. xxv. 7. Youth is oftentimes a time of great vanity and unmindfulness of God; many stains and spots are therein usually brought upon the con-

Digitized by Google

sciences of men. "Childhood and youth are vanity," Eccles. xi. 10; not because they soon pass away, but because they are usually spent in vanity, as the following advice of chap. xii. 1, to remember God in those days, doth manifest. The way of many is to wear such things out of mind, and not to walk in a sense of their folly and madness,—never to make thorough work with God about them. I speak of the saints themselves; for with others that live under the means of grace, whom God intends any way to make useful and industrious in their generation, this is the usual course:—by convictions, restraining grace, afflictions, love of employment and repute, God gives them *another heart* than they had for a season; another heart, but not a new heart. Hence, *another course of life*, another profession, other actions than formerly, do flow. With this change they do content themselves; they look on what is past perhaps with delight, or as things fit enough for those days, but not for those they have attained unto. Here they rest; and therefore never come to rest.

But I speak of the saints themselves, who make not such thorough, full, close work in this kind as they ought. An after-reckoning may come in on this hand to their own disturbance, and an unconquerable hinderance of their peace and settlement be brought in, on this account. So was it with Job, chap. xiii. 26, "He maketh me to possess the iniquities of my youth." God filled his heart, his thoughts, his mind, with these sins,—made them abide with him, so that he possessed them; they were always present with him. He made the sins of his youth the sufferings of his age. And it is a sad thing, as one speaks, when young sins and old bones meet together; as Zophar, chap. xx. 11, "His bones are full of the sins of his youth." The joyous frame of some men's youth makes way for sad work in their age. Take heed, young ones! you are doing that which will abide with you to age, if not to eternity. This possessing of the sins of youth, Job calls the "writing of bitter things against him;" as, indeed, it is impossible but that sin should be bitter one time or other. God calls it "a root that beareth gall and wormwood," Deut. xxix. 18; "a root of bitterness springing up into defilement," Heb. xii. 15. This, then, is to be searched out to the bottom. Israel will not have success nor peace whilst there is an Achan in the camp. Neither success in temptation nor consolation in believing is to be expected, whilst any Achan, any sin unreckoned for, lies on the conscience.

Now, for them who would seriously accomplish a diligent search in this matter, which is of such importance unto them, let them take these two directions:—

1. Let them go over the consideration of those sins, and others

Digitized by Google

of the like nature, which may be reduced unto *the same general heads with them, which we laid down before as the sins which generally cast men into depths and entanglements.* And if they find they have contracted the guilt of any of them, let them not think it strange that they are yet bewildered in their condition, and do come short of a refreshing sense of peace with God or an interest in forgiveness. Rather let them admire the riches of patience, grace, and forbearance, that they are not cast utterly out of all hopes of a recovery. This will speed an end unto their trouble, according to the direction given.

2. Let them *cast the course of their times under such heads and seasons as may give them the more clear and distinct view and apprehension of the passages in them between God and their souls which may have been provoking unto him.*

As, first, for the *state of their inward man*, let them consider,—

(1.) The *unregenerate part of their lives*, that which was confessedly so, before they had any real work of God upon their hearts; and therein inquire after two things:—First, If there were then any *great and signal eruptions of sins* against God; for of such God requires that a deep sense be kept on our souls all our days. How often do we find Paul calling over the sins of his life and ways before his conversion! "I was," saith he, "injurious, and a blasphemer." Such reflections ought persons to have on any great provoking occasions of sin, that may keep them humble, and necessitate them constantly to look for a fresh sense of pardon through the blood of Christ. If such sins lie neglected, and not considered according to their importance, they will weaken the soul in its comforts whilst it lives in this world. Secondly, If there were any *signal intimations made of the good-will and love of God* to the soul, which it broke off from through the power of its corruption and temptation, they require a due humbling consideration all our days. But this hath been before spoken unto.

(2.) *In that part of our lives which, upon the call of God, we have given up unto him*, there are two sorts of sins that do effectually impeach our future peace and comfort; which ought therefore to be frequently reviewed and issued in the blood of Christ:—First, Such as, by reason of any *aggravating circumstances*, have been accompanied with some especial unkindness towards God. Such are sins after warnings, communications of a sense of love, after particular engagements against them, relapses, omissions of great opportunities and advantages for the furtherance of the glory of God in the world. These kinds of sins have much unkindness attending them, and will be searched out if we cover them. Secondly, Sins attended with *scandal* towards fewer or more, or any one single person who is or

Digitized by Google

may be concerned in us. The aggravations of these kinds of sins are commonly known.

(3.) The various *outward states* and conditions which we have passed through, as of *prosperity and afflictions*, should in like manner fall under this search and consideration. It is but seldom that we fill up our duty or answer the mind of God in any dispensation of providence, and if our neglect herein be not managed aright, they will undoubtedly hinder and interrupt our peace.

Rule V.

The fifth rule—Distinction between unbelief and jealousy.

Learn to distinguish between unbelief and jealousy.

There is a twofold *unbelief*:—1. That which is *universal* and *privative*, such as is in all unregenerate persons; they have no faith at all,—that is, they are dead men, and have no principles of spiritual life. This I speak not of; it is easily distinguished from any grace, being the utter enemy and privation as it were of them all. 2. There is an unbelief *partial* and *negative*, consisting in a staggering at or questioning of the promises. This is displeasing to God, a sin which is attended with unknown aggravations, though men usually indulge it in themselves. It is well expressed, Ps. lxxviii. 19, 20. God had promised his presence to the people in the wilderness to feed, sustain, and preserve them. How did they entertain these promises of God? "Can he," say they, "give bread? can he provide flesh for his people?" verse 20. What great sin, crime, or offence is in this inquiry? Why, verse 19, this is called speaking against God: "They spake against God; they said, Can he furnish a table in the wilderness?" Unbelief in question of the promises is a "speaking against God;" a "limiting of the Holy One of Israel," as it is called, verse 41; an assigning of bounds to his goodness, power, kindness, and grace, according to what we find in ourselves, which he abhors. By this unbelief we make God like ourselves; that is, our limiting of him, expecting no more from him than either we can do, or see how it may be done. This, you will say, was a great sin in the Israelites, because they had no reason to doubt or question the promises of God. It is well we think so now; but when they were so many thousand families, that had not one bit of bread nor drop of water aforehand for themselves and their little ones, there is no doubt but they thought themselves to have as good reason to question the promises as any one of you can think that you have. We are ready to suppose that we have all the reasons

Digitized by Google

in the world: every one supposeth he hath those that are more cogent than any other hath to question the promises of grace, pardon, and forgiveness; and therefore the questioning of them is not their sin, but their duty. But pretend what we will, this is speaking against God, limiting of him; and that which is our keeping off from steadfastness and comfort.

But now there may be a *jealousy* in a gracious heart concerning the love of Christ, which is acceptable unto him, at least which he is tender towards, that may be mistaken for this questioning of the promises by unbelief, and so help to keep the soul in darkness and disconsolation. This the spouse expresseth in herself: Cant. viii. 6, "Love is strong as death; jealousy is hard as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame." Love is the foundation, the root; but yet it bears that fruit which is bitter, although it be wholesome,—that which fills the soul with great perplexities, and makes it cry out for a nearer and more secure admission into the presence of Christ. "Set me," saith the spouse, "as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for jealousy is cruel as the grave;"—"I cannot bear this distance from thee, these fears of my being disregarded by thee. 'Set me as a seal upon thine heart.'"

Now, this spiritual jealousy is the solicitousness of the mind of a believer, who hath a sincere love for Christ, about the heart, affection, and good-will of Christ towards it, arising from a consciousness of its own unworthiness to be beloved by him or accepted with him. All causeless jealousy ariseth from a secret sense and conviction of unworthiness in the person in whom it is, and a high esteem of him that is the object of it, or concerning whose love and affection any one is jealous. So it is with this spiritual jealousy. The root of it is love, sincere love, that cannot be "quenched by waters" nor "drowned by floods," verse 7,—which nothing can utterly prevail against or overcome. This gives the soul *high thoughts* of the glorious excellencies of Christ, fills it with admiration of him; these are mixed with a due *sense of its own baseness*, vileness, and unworthiness to be owned by him or accepted with him. Now, if these thoughts, on the one hand and on the other, be not directed, guided, and managed aright by faith,—which alone can show the soul how the glory of Christ consisteth principally in this, that he, being so excellent and glorious, is pleased to love us with love inexpressible who are vile and sinful,—questionings about the love of Christ, and those attended with much anxiety and trouble of mind, will arise. Now, this frame may sometimes be taken for a questioning of the promises of God, and that to be a defect in faith which is an excess of love, or at most such an irregular acting of it as the Lord Christ will be very tender towards, and which is consistent with peace and a due sense of the forgiveness

Digitized by Google

of sins. Mistake not, then, these one for another, lest much causeless unquietness ensue in the judgment which you are to make of yourselves.

But you will say, "How shall we distinguish between these two, so as not causelessly to be disquieted and perplexed?" I answer briefly,—

1. Unbelief, working in and by the questioning of the promises of God, is a *weakening, disheartening, dispiriting* thing. It takes off the edge of the soul from spiritual duties, and weakens it both as unto delight and strength. The more any one questions the promises of God, the less life, power, joy, and delight in obedience he hath; for faith is the spring and root of all other graces, and according as that thriveth or goeth backwards so do they all. Men think sometimes that their uncertainty of the love of God, and of acceptance with him by the forgiveness of sin, doth put them upon the performance of many duties; and they can have no rest or peace in the omission of them. It may be it is so; yea, this is the state and condition with many. But what are these duties? and how are they performed? and what is their acceptance with God? The duties themselves are legal; which denomination ariseth not from the nature, substance, or matter of them, for they may be the same that are required and enjoined in the gospel, but from the principle from whence they proceed and the end to which they are used. Now these in this case are both legal; their principle is legal fear, and their end is legal righteousness,—the whole attendance unto them a "seeking of righteousness as it were by the works of the law." And how are they performed? Plainly, with a bondage-frame of spirit, without love, joy, liberty, or delight. To quiet conscience, to pacify God, are the things in them aimed at, all in opposition to the blood and righteousness of Christ. And are they accepted with God? Let them be multiplied never so much, he everywhere testifieth that they are abhorred by him. This, then, unbelief mixed with convictions will do. It is the proper way of venting and exercising itself where the soul is brought under the power of conviction. But as unto gospel obedience, in all the duties of it, to be carried on in communion with God by Christ and delight in him, all questioning of the promises weakens and discourageth the soul, and makes them all wearisome and burdensome unto it.

But the jealousy that is exercised about the person and love of Christ unto the soul is quite of another nature, and produceth other effects. It cheers, enlivens, and enlargeth the soul, stirs up to activity, earnestness, and industry in its inquiries and desires after Christ. "Jealousy," saith the spouse, "'is hard as the grave;' therefore, 'set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm.'" It makes the soul restlessly pant after nearer, more sensible, and more

Digitized by Google

assured communion with Christ; it stirs up vigorous and active spirits in all duties. Every doubt and fear that it ingenerates concerning the love of Christ stirs up the soul unto more earnestness after him, delight in him, and sedulous watching against every thing that may keep it at a distance from him, or occasion him to hide, withdraw, or absent himself from it.

2. Unbelief, that works by questioning of the promises, is *universally selfish; it begins and ends in self.* Self-love, in desires after freedom from guilt, danger, and punishment, is the life and soul of it. May this end be attained, it hath no delight in God; nor doth it care what way it be attained, so it may be attained. May such persons have any persuasions that they shall be freed from death and hell, be it by the works of the law or by the observance of any inventions of their own, whether any glory ariseth unto God from his grace and faithfulness or no, they are not solicitous.

The jealousy we speak of hath the person of Christ and his excellency for its constant object. These it fills the mind with in many and various thoughts, still representing him more and more amiable and more desirable unto the soul: so doth the spouse upon the like occasion, as you may see at large, Cant. v. 9–16. Being at some loss for his presence, for he had withdrawn himself, not finding her wonted communion and intercourse with him, fearing that, upon her provocation, she might forfeit her interest in his love, she falls upon the consideration of all his excellencies; and thereby the more inflames herself into desires after his company and enjoyment. All these diverse things may be thus distinguished and discerned.

Rule VI.

Distinction between faith and spiritual sense.

Learn to distinguish between faith and spiritual sense.

This rule the apostle gives us, 2 Cor. v. 7, "We walk by faith, and not by sight." It is the sight of glory that is especially here intended. But faith and sense in any kind are clearly distinguished. That may be *believed* which is not *felt;* yea, it is the will and command of God that faith should stand and do its work where all sense fails, Isa. l. 10. And it is with spiritual sense in this matter as it is with natural. Thomas would not believe unless he saw the object of his faith with his eyes, or felt it with his hand. But saith our Saviour, "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet believe,"

Digitized by Google

—who believe upon the testimony of God, without the help of their own sense or reason. And if we will believe no more of God, of his love, of his grace, of our acceptance with him, than we have a spiritual affecting sense of, we shall be many times at a loss. Sensible impressions from God's love are great springs of joy; but they are not absolutely necessary unto peace, nor unto an evidence that we do believe.

We will deal thus with the vilest person living,—we will believe him whilst we have the certainty of our sense to secure us. And if we deal so with God, what is there in our so doing praiseworthy? The prophet tells us what it is to believe in respect of providence, Hab. iii. 17. When there is nothing left outward and visible to support us, then to rest quietly on God, that is to believe: so Ps. lxxiii. 26. And the apostle, in the example of Abraham, shows us what it is to believe with respect unto a special promise: Rom. iv. 18, "Against hope, he believed in hope." When he saw not any outward ordinary means for the accomplishment of the promise, when innumerable objections arose against any such hope as might have respect unto such means, yet he resolved all his thoughts into the faithfulness of God in the promise, and therein raised a new hope in its accomplishment; so in hope believing against hope.

To clear this matter, you must observe what I intend by this *spiritual sense*, which you must learn to distinguish faith from, and to know that true faith interesting the soul in forgiveness may be without it; that so you may not conclude unto a real want of pardon from the want of the refreshing sense of it.

Grace in general may be referred unto two heads:—1. Our *acceptation* with God through Christ,—the same upon the matter with the forgiveness of sin that we are treating of; and, 2. Grace of *sanctification* from God in Christ. Of each of these there is a spiritual sense or experience to be obtained, in both distinguished from faith that gives us a real interest in forgiveness.

1. Of the first, or the spiritual sense that we have of acceptance with God, there are sundry parts or degrees; as, first, hereunto belongs peace with God: Rom. v. 1, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." This peace is the rest and composure of the soul emerging out of troubles, upon the account of the reconciliation and friendship made for it by the blood of Christ. And it hath, as all peace hath, two parts,—first, a freedom from war, trouble, and distress; and, secondly, rest, satisfaction, and contentment in the condition attained; —and this, at least the second part of it, belongs unto the spiritual sense that we inquire after. Again: there is in it "joy in the Holy Ghost," called "joy unspeakable, and full of glory," 1 Pet. i. 8; as also "glorying in the Lord" upon the account of his grace, Isa. xlv. 25;

Digitized by Google

with many the like effects, proceeding from a "shedding abroad of the love of God in our hearts," Rom. v. 5.

Yea, you say, these are the things *you aim at;* these are the things you would attain, and be filled withal. It is this peace, this joy, this glorying in the Lord, that you would always be in the possession of. I say, you do well to desire them, to seek and labour after them,—they are purchased by Christ for believers; but you will do well to consider under what notion you do desire them. If you look on these things as belonging to the *essence of faith*, without which you can have no real interest in forgiveness or acceptance with God, you greatly deceive your own souls, and put yourselves out of the way of obtaining of them. These things are not believing, nor adequate effects of it, so as immediately to be produced wherever faith is; but they are such consequents of it as may or may not ensue upon it, according to the will of God. Faith is a seed that contains them *virtually*, and out of which they may be in due time educed by the working of the word and Spirit; and the way for any soul to be made partaker of them is to wait on the sovereignty of God's grace, who createth peace in the exercise of faith upon the promises. He, then, that would place believing in these things, and will not be persuaded that he doth believe until he is possessed of them, he doth both lose the benefit, advantage, and comfort of what he hath, and, neglecting the due acting of faith, puts himself out of the way of attaining what he aimeth at.

These things, therefore, are not needful to give you a *real saving interest* in forgiveness, as it is tendered in the promise of the gospel by the blood of Christ. And it may be it is not the will of God that ever you should be intrusted with them. It may be it would not be for your good and advantage so to be. Some servants that are ill husbands must have their wages kept for them to the year's end, or it will do them no good. It may be, some would be such spendthrifts of satisfying peace and joy, and be so diverted by them from attending unto some necessary duties,—as of humiliation, mortification, and self-abasement, without which their souls cannot live,—that it would not be much to their advantage to be intrusted with them. It is from the same care and love that peace and joy are detained from some believers, and granted unto others.

You are therefore to receive forgiveness by a pure act of believing, in the way and manner before at large described. And do not think that it is not in you unless you have constantly a spiritual sense of it in your hearts. See, in the *meantime*, that your faith bringeth forth *obedience*, and God in *due time* will cause it to bring forth *peace*.

2. The like may be said concerning the other head of grace, though

Digitized by Google

it be not so direct unto our purpose, yet tending also to the relief of the soul in its depths. This is the grace that we have from God in Christ for our sanctification. When the soul cannot find this in himself; when he hath not a spiritual sense and experience of its inbeing and power; when it cannot evidently distinguish it from that which is not right or genuine,—it is filled with fears and perplexities, and thinks it is yet in its sin. He is so, indeed, who hath no grace in him; but not he always who can find none in him. But these are different things. A man may have grace, and yet not have it at sometimes much acting; he may have grace for life, when he hath it not for fruitfulness and comfort, though it be his duty so to have it, Rev. iii. 2; 2 Tim. i. 6. And a man may have *grace acting* in him, and yet *not know*, not be sensible, that he hath acting grace. We see persons frequently under great temptations of apprehension that they have no grace at all, and yet at the same time, to the clearest conviction of all who are able to discern spiritual things, sweetly and genuinely to act faith, love, submission unto God, and that in a high and eminent manner. Ps. lxxxviii., Heman complains that he was "free among the dead," "a man of no strength," verses 4, 5,—as one that had no spiritual life, no grace. This afflicted his mind, and almost distracted him, verse 15; and yet there can be no greater expressions of faith and love to God than are mixed with his complaints.

These things, I say then, are not to be judged of by spiritual sense, but we are to live by faith about them. And no soul ought to conclude, that because it hath not the one it hath not the other,—that because it hath not joy and peace, it hath no interest in pardon and forgiveness.

Rule VII.

The seventh rule—Mix not foundation and building work together.

Mix not too much foundation and building work together. Our foundation in dealing with God is Christ alone, mere grace and pardon in him.

Our building is in and by holiness and obedience, as the fruits of that faith by which we have received the atonement. And great mistakes there are in this matter, which bring great entanglements on the souls of men. Some are all their days laying of the foundation, and are never able to build upon it unto any comfort to them-

Digitized by Google

selves or usefulness unto others; and the reason is, because they will be mixing with the foundation stones that are fit only for the following building. They will be bringing their obedience, duties, mortification of sin, and the like, unto the foundation. These are precious stones to build with, but unmeet to be first laid, to bear upon them the whole weight of the building. The foundation is to be laid, as was said, in *mere grace*, mercy, pardon in the blood of Christ. This the soul is to accept of and to rest in merely as it is grace, without the consideration of any thing in itself, but that it is sinful and obnoxious unto ruin. This it finds a difficulty in, and would gladly have something of its own to mix with it. It cannot tell how to fix these foundation-stones without some cement of its own endeavours and duty; and because these things will not mix, they spend a fruitless labour about it all their days. But if the foundation be of grace, it is not at all of works; for "otherwise grace is no more grace." If any thing of our own be mixed with grace in this matter, it utterly destroys the nature of grace; which if it be not alone, it is not at all. But doth this not tend to licentiousness? doth not this render obedience, holiness, duties, mortification of sin, and good works needless? God forbid; yea, this is the only way to order them aright unto the glory of God. Have we nothing to do but to lay the foundation? Yes; all our days we are to build upon it, when it is surely and firmly laid. And these are the means and ways of our edification. This, then, is the soul to do who would come to peace and settlement:—Let it let go all former endeavours, if it have been engaged unto any of that kind, and let it alone receive, admit of, and adhere to, mere grace, mercy, and pardon, with a full sense that in itself it hath nothing for which it should have an interest in them, but that all is of mere grace through Jesus Christ: "Other foundation can no man lay." Depart not hence until this work be well over. Surcease not an earnest endeavour with your own hearts to acquiesce in this righteousness of God, and to bring your souls unto a comfortable persuasion that "God for Christ's sake hath freely forgiven you all your sins." Stir not hence until this be effected. If you have been engaged in another way,—that is, to seek for an interest in the pardon of sin by some endeavours of your own,—it is not unlikely but that you are filled with the fruit of your own doings; that is, that you go on with all kinds of uncertainties, and without any kind of constant peace. Return, then, again hither; bring this foundation-work to a blessed issue in the blood of Christ; and when that is done, up and be doing.

You know how fatal and ruinous it is for souls to abuse the grace of God and the apprehension of the pardon of sins in the course of their obedience,—to countenance themselves in sin or the negligence

Digitized by Google

of any duty; this is to turn the grace of God into wantonness, as we have elsewhere at large declared. And it is no less pernicious to bring the duties of our obedience, any reserves for them, any hopes about them, into the matter of pardon and forgiveness, as we are to receive them from God. But these things, as they are distinct in themselves, so they must be distinctly managed in the soul; and the confounding of them is that which disturbs the peace and weakens the obedience of many. In a confused manner they labour to keep up a life of grace and duty; which will be in their places conjoined, but not mixed or compounded.

First, to take up mercy, pardon, and forgiveness absolutely on the account of Christ, and then to yield all obedience in the strength of Christ and for the love of Christ, is the life of a believer, Eph. ii. 8–10.

Rule VIII.

The eighth rule—Spend not time in heartless complaints.

Take heed of spending time in complaints when vigorous actings of grace are your duty.

Fruitless and heartless complaints, bemoanings of themselves and their condition, is the substance of the profession that some make. If they can object against themselves, and form complaints out of their conditions, they suppose they have done their duty. I have known some who have spent a good part of their time in going up and down from one to another with their objections and complaints. These things are contrary to the life of faith. It is good, indeed, in our spiritual distresses, to apply ourselves unto them who are furnished with the tongue of the learned, to know how to speak a word in season unto him that is weary; but for persons to fill their minds and imaginations with their own objections and complaints, not endeavouring to mix the words that are spoken for their relief and direction with faith, but going on still in their own way, this is of no use or advantage. And yet some, I fear, may please themselves in such course, as if it had somewhat of eminency in religion in it.

Others, it may be, drive the same trade in their thoughts, although they make not outwardly such complaints. They are conversant, for the most part, with heartless despondings. And in some they are multiplied by their natural constitutions or distempers. Examples of this kind occur unto us every day. Now, what is the advantage

Digitized by Google

of these things? What did Zion get when she cried, "The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me?" or Jacob, when he said, "My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?" Doubtless they did prejudice themselves. How doth David rouse up himself when he found his mind inclinable unto such a frame? for having said, "Why dost thou cast me off? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?" he quickly rebukes and recollects himself, saying, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God," Ps. xliii. 2, 5.

We must say, then, unto such heartless complainers, as God did to Joshua, "Get you up; why lie you thus upon your faces?" Do you think to mend your condition by wishing it better, or complaining it is so bad? Are your complaints of want of an interest in forgiveness a sanctified means to obtain it? Not at all; you will not deal so with yourselves in things natural or civil. In such things you will take an industrious course for a remedy or for relief. In things of the smallest importance in this world and unto this life, you will not content yourselves with wishing and complaining; as though industry in the use of natural means, for the attaining of natural ends, were the ordinance of God, and diligence in the use of spiritual means, for the obtaining of spiritual ends, were not.

Do not consult your own hearts only. What is it that the Scripture calls for in your condition? Is it not industry and activity of spirit? And what doth the nature of the thing require? Distress that is yet hoped to be conquered evidently calls for industry and diligence in the use of means for deliverance. If you are past hope, it avails not to complain; if you are not, why do you give up yourselves to despondencies? Our Saviour tells us that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force," Matt. xi. 12. It is not of the outward violence of its enemies seeking to destroy it that our Saviour speaks, but of that spiritual fervency and ardency of mind that is in those who intend to be partakers of it; for βιάζεται, "is taken by force," Luke xvi. 16, is no more but εὐαγγελίζεται, "is preached;"—"The kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." Pressing into it, and taking it by force, are the same thing. There is, then, a violence, a restless activity and vigour of spirit, to be used and exercised for an interest in this kingdom. Apply this to your condition. Are you in depths and doubts, staggering and uncertain, not knowing what is your condition, nor whether you have any interest in the forgiveness that is with God? Are you tossed up and down between hopes and fears? [Do you] want peace, consolation, and establishment? Why lie you upon your faces? Get up, watch, pray, fast, meditate, offer violence to your

Digitized by Google

lusts and corruptions; fear not, startle not at their crying or importunities to be spared; press unto the throne of grace by prayers, supplications, importunities, restless requests. This is the way to take the kingdom of heaven. These things are not peace, they are not assurance; but they are part of the means that God hath appointed for the attainment of them.

What, then, is the peculiar instruction that is proper for souls in this condition? That, plainly, of the apostle, 2 Pet. i. 10, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure." "Alas!" saith the soul, "I am at no certainty, but rather am afflicted and tossed, and not comforted. My heart will come to no stability. I have no assurance, know not whether I am chosen or called; yea, fear that my latter end will be darkness and sorrow. There is, I confess, forgiveness with God, but [I] justly fear I shall never be made partaker of it." What is the usual course that is taken in such complaints by them to whom they are made? Mostly, they have a good opinion of them that come with these complaints; they judge them to be godly and holy, though much in the dark. If they knew them not before, yet upon these complaints they begin to be well persuaded of them. Hereupon, they are moved with pity and compassion, and troubled to see them in their perplexities, and set themselves to tender relief unto them: they mind them of the gracious promises of the gospel; it may be, fix upon some one or more of them in particular, which they explain to them; thence they mind them of the abundant grace and tender love of the Father, of the merciful care of our High Priest, his readiness and ability to save, his communications of such favours unto them as they perceive not. By such ways and means, by such applications, do they seek to relieve them in the state and condition wherein they are. But what is the issue? Doth not this relief prove, for the most part, like the morning cloud, and as the early dew? A little refreshment it may be it yields for a season, but is quickly again dried up, and the soul left in its heartless, withering condition.

You will say, then, "Do you condemn this manner of proceeding with the souls of men in their doubts, fears, and distresses? or would you have them pine away under the sense of their condition, or abide in this uncertainty all their days?" I answer, No; I condemn not the way; I would not have any left comfortless in their depths. But yet I would give these two cautions:—

1. That *spiritual wisdom* and prudence is greatly required in this matter, in the administration of consolation to distressed souls. If in any thing, the tongue of the spiritually learned is required herein, —namely, in speaking a word in season to them that are weary. A promiscuous drawing out of gospel consolations, without a previous

Digitized by Google

right judgment concerning the true state and condition of the souls applied unto, is seldom useful, ofttimes pernicious. And let men take care how they commit their souls and consciences unto such who have good words in readiness for all comers.

2. If counsel and consolation of this kind be given, special and distinct from the advice we are upon of *watchfulness*, diligence, spiritual violence in a way of duty, it is exceeding dangerous, and will assuredly prove useless; for let us see what counsel the Holy Ghost gives in this condition unto them who would make their "calling and election sure," who would be freed from their present fears and uncertainties, who complain of their darkness and dangers. Why, saith he, "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue," and so on, 2 Pet. i. 5–7; "for," saith he, "if ye do these things ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," verse 11. You who are now in the skirts of it, who know not whether you belong to it or no, you shall have an entrance into the kingdom of Christ, and all the joy, comforts, consolations, and glory of it shall be richly administered unto you. This is the advice that the Holy Ghost gives in this case; and this is the blessed promise annexed unto the following of this advice; and this the former compassionate course of administering consolation is not to be separated from.

But you will, it may be, here say, "We are so dead and dull, so chained under the power of corruptions and temptations, that we are not able thus to put forth the fruit of a spiritual life in adding one grace unto another." But do you use diligence, study, endeavours, all diligence, diligence at all times, in all ways by God appointed, all manner of diligence within and without, in private and public, to this end and purpose? Do you study, meditate, pray, watch, fast, neglect no opportunity, keep your hearts, search, try, examine yourselves, flee temptations and occasions of cooling, deadening, and stifling grace? Do these things abound in you? Alas! you *cannot* do thus, you are so weak, so indisposed. But, alas! you *will not*, you will not part with your ease, you will not crucify your lusts, you will not use all diligence; but must come to it, or be contented to spend all your days in darkness, and to lie down in sorrow.

Thus do men frequently miscarry. Is it any news, for persons to bewail the folly of their nature and ways in the morning and evening, and yet scarce stand upon their watch any part of the day, or in any occasion of the day? Is this "giving all diligence?" Is this "working out our salvation with fear and trembling?" And may we not see professors even indulging themselves in ways of vanity, folly, wrath, envy, sloth, and the like, and yet complain at what a loss they are, how unquiet, how uncertain? God forbid it should be

Digitized by Google

otherwise with you, or that we should endeavour to speak peace unto you in any such a frame. To hear of a person that he walks slothfully, carelessly, or indulgeth his corruptions, and to find him complaining that he is at a loss whether he have any interest in pardon or no; to give or tender comfort to such mourners, without a due admonition of their duty to use diligence in the use of means, for to help on their delivery out of the condition wherein they are, is to tender poison unto them.

To this, then, the soul must come that is in depths, if it intend to be delivered. Heartless complaints, with excuses to keep it from vigorous, spiritual diligence, must be laid aside; if not, ordinarily, peace, rest, and stability will not be obtained. A great example hereof we have in the spouse, Cant. v. 2–8. She is drowsy and indisposed unto communion with Christ, whereunto she is invited, verse 2; this puts her upon making excuses, from the unfitness of the time, and her present indisposition and unpreparedness as to the duty whereunto she was called, verse 3. Hereupon Christ withdraws his presence from her, and leaves her at a loss as to her former comforts, verse 6. What course doth she now take? Doth she now lie down again in her former slumber? doth she make use of her former excuses and pretences why she should not engage into the duties she was called unto? No such thing; but now, with all earnestness, diligence, sedulity, and importunity, she engageth in all manner of duties, whereby she may recover her former comforts, as you may see in the text. And this must be the course of others who would obtain the same success. Spiritual peace and sloth will never dwell together in the same soul and conscience.

Rule IX.

The ninth rule—Take heed of undue expressions concerning God and his ways in distress.

Take heed, in doubts, distresses, and perplexities, of hard thoughts of God, hasty unweighed expressions concerning him or his ways, or of secret resolves that it were as good give over waiting as continue in the state wherein you are, seeing your condition is remediless.

On three occasions are such thoughts and resolves apt to befall the minds of men; which sometimes break forth into unwarrantable expressions concerning God himself and his ways:—

Digitized by Google

1. In *deep perplexities* of mind, by reason of some pressing terror from the Lord.

2. On the *long wearisome continuance* of some tempting distress; and hereof we have many examples, some whereof shall be mentioned.

3. In *spiritual disappointments*, through the strength of lust or temptation. When a person hath, it may be, recovered himself, through grace, from a perplexing sense of the guilt of some sin, or it may be from a course, shorter or longer, lesser or greater, of backsliding and negligent walking with God, and therein goes on cheerfully for a season in the course of his obedience; if this person, through the power of temptation, subtilty of lusts, neglect of watchfulness, by one means or other, is surprised in the sins or ways that he had relinquished, or is turned aside from the vigour of that course wherein he was engaged, he may be exposed not only to great despondencies, but also be overtaken with secret resolves to give over contending, seeing it is to no more purpose, nay, to no purpose, and that God regards him not at all.

Take an instance or two in each kind:—

The first we have in Job, in the extremity of his trials and terrors from the Lord. See, among other places, chap. x. 3: "Is it," saith he to God, "good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thine hands?" Ah! poor worms, with whom have we to do? "Who shall say unto a king, Thou art wicked? and to princes, Ye are ungodly? And will ye speak to Him who respecteth not the person of princes, nor regardeth them more than the poorest in the earth?" And see what conclusions from such thoughts as these he doth infer: chap. xiv. 16, 17, "Thou numberest my steps: dost thou not watch over my sin? My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity." He chargeth God to be his enemy, one that watched for all opportunities and advantages against him, that seemed to be glad at his halting, and take care that none of his sins should be missing when he intended to deal with him. Had this indeed been the case with him, he had perished unto eternity, as elsewhere he acknowledged.

Of the other we have an instance in the church: Lam. iii. 18, "I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD." Present grace in spiritual strength and future expectation of mercy are all gone. And what is got by this? Secret hard thoughts of God himself are hereby ingenerated: as verse 8, "When I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer;" verse 44, "Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through." These things are grievous unto God to bear, and no way useful to the soul in its condition; yea, they more and more unfit it for every duty that may lie in a tendency to its relief and deliverance.

Digitized by Google

So was it with Jonah: chap. ii. 4, "I said, I am cast out of thy sight;"—"All is lost and gone with me; as good give over as contend; I do but labour in vain. Perish I must, as one cast out of the sight of God." The like complaints fell also from Heman in his distress, Ps. lxxxviii.

The general who heard one of his soldiers cry out, upon a fresh onset of the enemy, "Now we are undone, now we are ruined," called him a traitor, and told him it was not so whilst he could wield his sword. It is not for every private soldier on every danger to make judgment of the battle; that is the work of the general. Jesus Christ is "the captain of our salvation;" he hath undertaken the leading and conduct of our souls through all our difficulties. Our duty is to fight and contend; his work is to take care of the event, and to him it is to be committed.

That, then, you make a due use of this rule, keep always in your minds these two considerations:—

1. That *it is not for you to take the judgment of Christ out of his hand*, and to be passing sentence upon your own souls. Judgment as to the state and condition of men is committed unto Christ, and to him it is to be left. This we were directed unto in our first rule, and it is of special use in the case under consideration. Self-judging in reference unto sin and the demerit of it is our duty. The judging of our state and condition in relation unto the remedy provided is the office and work of Jesus Christ, with whom it is to be left.

2. Consider that *hard thoughts of what God will do with you, and harsh desponding sentences pronounced against yourselves, will insensibly alienate your hearts from God.* It may be when men's perplexities are at the height, and the most sad expressions are as it were wrested from them, they yet think they must justify God, and that they do so accordingly. But yet such thoughts as those mentioned are very apt to infect the mind with other inclinations: for after a while they will prevail with the soul to look on God as an enemy, as one that hath no delight in it; and what will be the consequence thereof is easily discernible. None will continue to love long where they expect no returns. Suffer not, then, your minds to be tainted with such thoughts; and let not God be dishonoured by any such expressions as reflect on that infinite grace and compassion which he is exercising towards you.

Digitized by Google

RULE X.

The tenth rule—Duly improve the least appearances of God in a way of grace or pardon.

If you would come to stability, and a comforting persuasion of an interest in forgiveness by the blood of Christ, *improve the least appearances of him unto your souls, and the least intimations of his love in pardon, that are made unto you in the way of God.* The spouse takes notice of her Husband, and rejoiceth in him, when he stands behind the wall, when he doth but look forth at the window and show himself at the lattice,—when she could have no clear sight of him, Cant. ii. 9. She lays hold on the least appearance of him to support her heart withal, and to stir up her affections towards him. Men in dangers do not sit still to wait until something presents itself unto them that will give assured deliverance; but they close with that which first presents itself unto them, that is of the same kind and nature with what they look after. And thus God doth in many places express such supportments as give the soul little more than a possibility of attaining the end aimed at: as Zeph. ii. 3, "It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger;" and Joel ii. 14, "Who knoweth but he will return and leave a blessing?"—"It may be we shall be hid; it may be we shall have a blessing." And this was the best ground that Jonathan had for the great undertaking against the enemies of God: 1 Sam. xiv. 6, "It may be that the LORD will work for us." And to what end doth God at any time make these seemingly dubious intimations of grace and mercy? Is it that we should, by the difficulty included in them, be discouraged and kept from him? Not at all; he speaks nothing to deter sinners, especially distressed sinners, from trusting in him. But his end is, that we should close with, and lay hold upon and improve, the least appearances of grace, which this kind of expressions doth give unto us. When men are in a voyage at sea, and meet with a storm or a tempest which abides upon them, and they fear will at last prevail against them, if they make so far a discovery of land as that they can say, "It may be there is land, it may be it is such a place where there is a safe harbour," none can positively say it is not; there lies no demonstration against it. In this condition, especially if there be no other way of escape, delivery, or safety proposed to them, this is enough to make them to follow on that discovery, and with all diligence to steer their course that way, until they have made a trial of it unto the utmost. The soul of which we speak is afflicted and tossed, and not comforted. There is in the

Digitized by Google

intimation of grace and pardon intended a remote discovery made of some relief. This may be Christ; it may be forgiveness. This it is convinced of; it cannot deny but at such or such a time, under such ordinances, or in such duties, it was persuaded that yet there might be mercy and pardon for it. This is enough to carry it to steer its course constantly that way,—to press forward unto that harbour which will give it rest. How little was it that David had to bring his soul unto a composure in his great distress! 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26: "If," saith he, "I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again, and shew me the ark, and his habitation: but if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him." He hath nothing but sovereign grace to rest upon, and that he gives himself up unto.

Faith is indeed *the soul's venture for eternity.* Something it is to venture on as to its eternal condition. It must either adhere unto itself or its own vain hopes of a righteousness of its own; or it must give over all expectation and lie down in darkness; or it must shut out all dreadful apprehensions of eternity, by the power and activity of its lusts and carnal affections; or it must, whatever its discouragements be, cast itself upon pardon in the blood of Jesus Christ. Now, if all the former ways be detestable and pernicious, if the best of them be a direct opposition unto the gospel, what hath the soul that inquires after these things to do but to adhere unto the last, and to improve every encouragement, even the least, to that purpose?

RULE XI.

[Consider where lies the hinderance to peace.]

As a close unto these general rules, I shall only add this last direction:—*Consider in particular where the stress and hinderance lies that keeps you off from peace,* through an established persuasion of an interest in evangelical pardon. Do not always fluctuate up and down in generals and uncertainties; but drive things unto a particular issue, that it may be tried whether it be of sufficient efficacy to keep you in your present entanglements and despondencies. Search out your wound, that it may be tried whether it be curable or no.

Now, in this case, we cannot expect that persons should suggest their own particular concerns, that so they might be considered and

Digitized by Google

be brought unto the rule; but we must ourselves reduce such distresses as may or do in this matter befall the minds of men unto some general heads, and give a judgment concerning them according to the word of truth. Indeed, particular cases, as varied by circumstances, are endless, nor can they be spoken unto in this way of instruction and direction; but they must be left to occasional considerations of them, as they are represented unto them who are intrusted to dispense the mysteries of God. Besides, many have laboured already in this matter, and their endeavours are in and of general use; although it must be said, as was before observed, that special cases are so varied by their circumstances, that it is very rare that any resolutions of them are every way adequate and suited unto the apprehensions of them that are exercised with them. I shall therefore call things unto some general heads, whereunto most of the objections that distressed sinners make against their own peace may be reduced, and leave the light of them to be applied in particular unto the relief of the souls of men, as God shall be pleased to make them effectual.

Second general head of the application of the truth insisted on—Grounds of spiritual disquietments considered—The first, afflictions—Ways and means of the aggravation of afflictions—Rules about them.

THAT which now lieth before us is the SECOND part of the second general use educed from the truth insisted on. Our aim is, to lead on souls towards peace with God, through a gracious persuasion of their interest in that forgiveness which is with him; and it consists, as was declared, in a consideration of *some of those disquietments which befall the minds of men, and keep them off from establishment in this matter.*

And, FIRST, such disquietments and objections against the peace of the soul and its acceptance with God will arise from afflictions; they have done so of old, they do so in many at this day. Afflictions, I say, greatened unto the mind from their nature or by their concomitants, do ofttimes variously affect it, and sometimes prevail to darken it so far as to ingenerate thoughts that they are all messengers of wrath, all tokens of displeasure, and so, consequently, evidences that we are not pardoned or accepted with God.

Now, this is a time of *great afflictions* unto many, and those, some of them, such as have innumerable aggravating circumstances accompanying of them. Some have come with a dreadful surprisal in

Digitized by Google

things not looked for, such as falls not out in the providence of God in many generations. Such is the condition of them who are reduced to the utmost extremity by the late consuming fire; some have had their whole families, all their posterity, taken from them. In a few days they have been suddenly bereaved, as in the plague. Some in their own persons, or in their relations, have had sore, long, and grievous trials from oppressions and persecutions. And these things have various effects on the minds of men. Some we find crying, with that wicked king, "This evil is of the LORD; why should we wait any longer for him?" and give up themselves to seek relief from their own lusts;—some bear up under their troubles with a natural stoutness of spirit;—some have received a sanctified use and improvement of their trials with joy in the Lord: but many we find to go heavily under their burdens, having their minds darkened with many misapprehensions of the love of God and of their own personal interest in his grace. It is not, therefore, unseasonable to speak a little to this head of trouble in our entrance. Outward troubles, I say, are oftentimes *occasions*, if not the *causes*, of great inward distresses. You know how the saints of old expressed their sense of them and conflicts with them. The complaints of David are familiar to all who attend unto any communion with God in these things; so are those of Job, Heman, Jonah, Jeremiah, and others: neither do they complain only of their troubles, but of the sense which they had of God's displeasure in and under them, and of his hiding of his face from them whilst they were so exercised.

It is not otherwise at present, as is known unto such as converse with many who are either surprised with unexpected troubles, or worn out with trials and disappointments of an expected end. They consider themselves both absolutely and with respect unto others, and upon both accounts are filled with dark thoughts and despondencies. Saith one, "I am rolled from one trial unto another. The clouds with me return still after the rain. All the billows and water-spouts of God go over me. In my person, it may be, pressed with sickness, pains, troubles; in my relations, with their sins, miscarriages, or death; in my outward state, in want, losses, disreputation. I am even as a withered branch. Surely if God had any especial regard unto my soul, it would not be thus with me, or some timely end would have been put unto these dispensations." On the other hand, they take a view of some other professors; they see that their tables are spread day by day, that the candle of the Lord shines continually on their tabernacle, and that in all things they have their hearts' desire, setting aside the common attendancies of human nature, and nothing befalls them grievous in the world. "Thus it is with them. And surely, had I an interest in his grace, in pardon,

Digitized by Google

the God of Israel would not thus pursue a flea in the mountains, nor set himself in battle array against a leaf driven to and fro with the wind; he would spare me a little, and let me alone for a moment. But as things are with me, I fear 'my way is hidden from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God.'" This kind of thoughts do perplex the minds of men, and keep them off from partaking of that strong consolation which God is abundantly willing they should receive, by a comfortable persuasion of a blessed interest in that forgiveness that is with him.

And this was the very case of David; or at least these outward troubles were a special part of those depths out of which he cried for relief, by a sense of pardon, grace, and redemption with God.

I answer to these complaints, first, that there are so many excellent things spoken concerning afflictions, their necessity, their usefulness, and the like,—such blessed ends are assigned unto them, and in many have been compassed and fulfilled by them,—that a man, unacquainted with the exercise wherewith they are attended, would think it impossible that any one should be shaken in mind as to the love and favour of God on their account. But as the apostle tells us that no afflictions are joyous at present, but grievous, so he who made, in the close of his trials, that solemn profession, that "it was good for him that he had been afflicted," yet we know, as hath been declared, how he was distressed under them. There are, therefore, sundry accidental things which accompany great afflictions, that seem to exempt them from the common rule and the promise of love and grace; as,—

1. *The remembrance of past and buried miscarriages and sins lies in the bosom of many afflictions.* It was so with Job: "Thou makest me," saith he, "to possess the iniquities of my youth." See his plea to that purpose, chap. xiii. 23–27. In the midst of his troubles and distresses, God revived upon his spirit a sense of former sins, even the sins of his youth, and made him to possess them; he filled his soul and mind with thoughts of them and anxiety about them. This made him fear lest God was his enemy, and would continue to deal with him in all severity. So was it with Joseph's brethren in their distresses: Gen. xlii. 21, "They said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us;" and verse 22, "Behold, his blood is required." Their distress revives a deep, perplexing sense of the guilt of sin many years past before, and that under all its aggravating circumstances; which spoiled them of all their reliefs and comforts, filling them with confusion and trouble, though absolutely innocent as to what was come on them. And the like appeared in the widow

Digitized by Google

of Zarephath, with whom Elijah sojourned during the famine. Upon the death of her son, which, it seems, was somewhat extraordinary, she cried out unto the prophet, "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" 1 Kings xvii. 18. It seems some great sin she had formerly contracted the guilt of, and now, upon her sore affliction in the death of her only child, the remembrance of it was recalled and revived upon her soul. Thus "deep calleth unto deep at the noise of God's water-spouts," and then "all his waves and billows go over" a person, Ps. xlii. 7. The deep of afflictions calleth up the deep of the guilt of sin, and both in conjunction become as billows and waves passing over the soul. We see only the outside of men's afflictions; they usually complain only of what doth appear: and an easy thing it is supposed to be to apply relief and comfort unto those that are distressed. The rule in this matter is so clear, so often repeated and inculcated, the promises annexed unto this condition so many and precious, that every one hath in readiness what to apply unto them who are so exercised. But oftentimes we know nothing of the gall and wormwood that is in men's affliction; they keep that to themselves, and their souls feed upon them in secret, Lam. iii. 19. God hath stirred up the remembrance of some great sin or sins, and they look upon their afflictions as that wherein he is come or beginning to enter into judgment with them. And is it any wonder if they be in darkness, and filled with disconsolation?

2. There is in many afflictions something that seems *new* and peculiar, wherewith the soul is surprised, and cannot readily reduce its condition unto what is taught about afflictions in general. This perplexeth and entangleth it. It is not affliction it is troubled withal, but some one thing or other in it that appears with an especial dread unto the soul, so that he questioneth whether ever it were so with any other or no, and is thereby deprived of the supportment which from former examples it might receive. And, indeed, when God intendeth that which shall be a deep affliction, he will put an edge upon it, in matter, or manner, or circumstances, that shall make the soul feel its sharpness. He will not take up with our bounds and measures, and with which we think we could be contented; but he will put the impress of his own greatness and terror upon it, that he may be acknowledged and submitted unto. Such was the state with Naomi, when, from a full and plentiful condition, she went into a strange country with a husband and two sons, where they all died, leaving her destitute and poor. Hence, in her account of God's dealing with her, she says, "Call me not Naomi" (that is, pleasant), "call me Mara" (that is, bitter): "for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD hath

Digitized by Google

brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?" Ruth i. 20, 21. So was it with Job, with the widow of Zarephath, and with her at Nain who was burying her only child. And still in many afflictions God is pleased to put in an entangling specialty, which perplexeth the soul, and darkens it in all its reasonings about the love of God towards it and its interest in pardon and grace.

3. In some, *affections* are very strong and importunate as fixed on lawful things, whereby their nature is made *sensible and tender*, and apt to receive *very deep impressions* from urgent afflictions. Now, although this in itself be a good natural frame, and helps to preserve the soul from that stout-heartedness which God abhors, yet if it be not watched over, it is apt to perplex the soul with many entangling temptations. The apostle intimates a double evil that we are obnoxious unto under trials and afflictions, Heb. xii. 5, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." Men may either, through a natural stoutness, despise and contemn their sufferings, and be obstinate under them, or faint and despond; and so come short of the end which God aims at for them, to be attained in a way of duty. Now, though the frame spoken of be not obnoxious unto the first extreme, yet it is greatly to the latter; which, if not watched against, is no less pernicious than the former. Affections in such persons being greatly moved, they cloud and darken the mind, and fill it with strange apprehensions concerning God and themselves. Every thing is presented unto them through a glass composed of fear, dread, terror, sorrow, and all sorts of disconsolations. This makes them faint and despond, unto very sad apprehensions of themselves and their conditions.

4. Afflictions find some entangled with very *strong corruptions*,—as love of the world, or the pleasure of it, of name or reputation, of great contrivances for posterity, and the like; or it may be in things carnal or sensual. Now, when these unexpectedly meet together,—great afflictions and strong corruptions,—it is not conceivable what a combustion they will make in the soul. As a strong medicine or potion meeting with a strong or tough distemper in the body,—there is a violent contention in nature between them and about them, so that oftentimes the very life of the patient is endangered; so it is where a great trial, a smart stroke of the hand of God, falls upon a person in the midst of his pursuit of the effects of some corruptions,—the soul is amazed even to distraction, and can scarce have any thought but that God is come to cut the person off in the midst of his sin. Every unmortified corruption fills the very fear and expectation of affliction with horror. And there is good reason that so it should do; for although God should be merciful unto men's ini-

Digitized by Google

quities, yet if he should come to take vengeance of their inventions, their condition would be dark and sorrowful.

5. *Satan* is never wanting in such occasions to attempt the compassing of his ends upon persons that are exercised under the hand of God. In the time of suffering it was that he fell upon the Head of the church, turning it into the very hour of the power of darkness. And he will not omit any appearing opportunities of advantage against his members. And this is that which he principally, in such seasons, attacks them withal,—namely, that God regards them not, that they are fallen under his judgment and severity, as those who have no share in mercy, pardon, or forgiveness.

From these and the like reasons, I say, it is, that whereas afflictions in general are so testified unto, to be such pledges and tokens of God's love and care, to be designed unto blessed ends as conformity unto Christ, and a participation of the holiness of God; yet, by reason of these circumstances, they often prove means of casting the soul into depths, and of hindering it from a refreshing interest in the forgiveness that is with God. That this may prove no real or abiding ground of inward spiritual trouble unto the soul, the following rules and directions may be observed:—

1. *Not only afflictions in general, but great and manifold afflictions, and those attended with all sorts of aggravating circumstances, are always consistent with the pardon of sin, after* [*often?*] *signal tokens and pledges of it, and of the love of God therein:* Job vii. 17, 18, "What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? and that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?" What were the considerations that cast him into this admiration of the care and love of God is expressed, verses 12–16. There are no words of a more dismal import in the whole book than those here expressed: yet, when he recollected himself from his overwhelming distress, he acknowledgeth that all this proceeded from the love and care of God; yea, his fixing his heart upon a man to magnify him, to set him up and do him good. For this end doth he chasten a man every morning, and try him every moment; and that with such afflictions as are for the present so far from being joyous as that they give no rest, but even weary the soul of life, as he expresseth their effects on himself, verses 15, 16. And hence it is observed of this Job, that when none in the earth was like to him in trouble, God gave him three testimonies from heaven that there was none in the earth like unto him in grace. And although it may not be laid down as a general rule, yet for the most part in the providence of God, from the foundation of the world, those who have had most of afflictions have had most of grace and the most eminent testimonies of acceptance with God.

Digitized by Google

Christ Jesus, the Son of God, the head of the church, had all afflictions gathered into a head in him, and yet the Father always loved him, and was always well pleased with him.

When God solemnly renewed his covenant with Abraham, and he had prepared the sacrifice whereby it was to be ratified and confirmed, God made a smoking furnace to pass between the pieces of the sacrifice, Gen. xv. 17. It was to let him know that there was a furnace of affliction attending the covenant of grace and peace. And so he tells Zion that he "chose her in the furnace of affliction," Isa. xlviii. 10; —that is, in Egyptian affliction; burning, flaming afflictions; "fiery trials," as Peter calls them, 1 Pet. iv. 12. There can, then, no argument be drawn from affliction, from any kind of it, from any aggravating circumstance wherewith it may be attended, that should any way discourage the soul in the comforting, supporting persuasion of an interest in the love of God and forgiveness thereby.

2. *No length or continuance of afflictions ought to be any impeachment of our spiritual consolation.* Take for the confirmation hereof the great example of the Son of God. How long did his afflictions continue? what end or issue was put to them? No longer did they abide than until "he cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost." To the moment of his death, from his manger to his cross, his afflictions still increased, and he ended his days in the midst of them. Now, he was the head of the church, and the great representative of it, unto a conformity with whom we are predestinated. And if God will have it so with us even in this particular, so as that we shall have no rest, no peace from our trials, until we lie down in the grave, that whatever condition we pass through they shall be shut out of none, but only from immortality and glory, what have we herein to complain of?

3. *Where the remembrance and perplexing sense of past sins is revived by present afflictions, separate them in your minds and deal distinctly about them.* So long as you carry on the consideration of them jointly, you will be rolled from one to another, and never obtain rest unto your souls. They will mutually aggravate each other. The sharpness of affliction will add to the bitterness of the sense of sin; and the sense of sin will give an edge to affliction, and cause it to pierce deeply into the soul, as we showed in the former instances. Deal, therefore, distinctly about them, and in their proper order. So doth the psalmist here. He had at present both upon him; and together they brought him into these depths, concerning which he so cries out for deliverance from them: see Ps. xxxii. 3–5. And what course doth he take? He applies himself in the first place to his sin and the guilt of it, and that distinctly and separately. And when he hath got a discharge of sin, which he

Digitized by Google

waited so earnestly for, his faith quickly arose above his outward trials, as appears in his blessed close of all: "'He shall redeem Israel out of all his trouble;' the whole Israel of God, and myself amongst them." This do, then:—Single out the sin or sins that are revived in the sense of their guilt upon the conscience; use all diligence to come to an issue about them in the blood of Christ. This God by your affliction calls you unto. This is the *disease*, whereof your trouble is but the *symptom*. This, therefore, in the cure you seek after, is first and principally to be attended unto; when that is once removed, the other, as to any prejudice unto your soul, will depart of itself. The root being once digged up, you shall not long feed on the bitter fruit that it hath brought forth; or if you do, the wormwood shall be taken out of it, and it shall be very pleasant unto you, as well as wholesome. How this is to be done, by an application unto God for forgiveness, hath been at large declared. But if men will deal with confused thoughts about their sins and their troubles, their wound will be incurable and their sorrow endless.

4. *Remember that a time of affliction is a time of temptation.* Satan, as we have showed, will not be wanting unto any appearing opportunity or advantage of setting upon the soul. When Pharaoh heard that the people were entangled in the wilderness, he pursued them; and when Satan sees a soul entangled with its distresses and troubles, he thinks it his time and hour to assault it. He seeks to winnow, and comes when the corn is under the flail. Reckon, therefore, that when trouble cometh, the prince of the world cometh also, that you may be provided for him. Now is the time to take the shield of faith, that we may be able to quench his fiery darts. If they be neglected, they will inflame the soul. Watch, therefore, and pray, that you enter not into temptation, that Satan do not represent God falsely unto you. He that durst represent Job falsely to the all-seeing God will with much boldness represent God falsely unto us, who see and know so little. Be not, then, ignorant of his devices, but every way set yourselves against his interposing between God and your souls in a matter which he hath nothing to do withal. Let not this *make-bate* by any means inflame the difference.

5. *Learn to distinguish the effect of natural distempers from spiritual distresses.* Some have sad, dark, and tenacious thoughts fixed on their minds from their natural distempers. These will not be cured by reasonings, nor utterly quelled by faith. Our design must be, to abate their efficacy and consequents by considering their occasions. And if men cannot do this in themselves, it is highly incumbent on those who make application of relief unto them to be careful to discern what is from such principles, whereof they are not to expect a speedy cure. And,—

Digitized by Google

6. *Take heed in times of peace and ease that you lay not up, by your negligence or careless walking, sad provision for a day of darkness, a time of afflictions.* It is sin that imbitters troubles; the sins of peace are revived in time of distress. Fear of future affliction, of impendent troubles, should make us careful not to bring that into them which will make them bitter and sorrowful.

7. *Labour to grow better under all your afflictions, lest your afflictions grow worse,* lest God mingle them with more darkness, bitterness, and terror. As Joab said unto David, if he ceased not his scandalous lamentation on the death of Absalom, all the people would leave him, and he then should find himself in a far worse condition than that which he bemoaned, or any thing that befell him from his youth;—the same may be said unto persons under their afflictions. If they are not managed and improved in a due manner, that which is worse may, nay, in all probability will, befall them. Wherever God takes this way, and engageth in afflicting, he doth commonly pursue his work until he hath prevailed, and his design towards the afflicted party be accomplished. He will not cease to thresh and break the bread-corn until it be meet for his use. Lay down, then, the weapons of thy warfare against him; give up yourselves to his will; let go every thing about which he contends with you; follow after that which he calls you unto; and you will find light arising unto you in the midst of darkness. Hath he a cup of affliction in one hand?—lift up your eyes, and you will see a cup of consolation in another. And if all stars withdraw their light whilst you are in the way of God, assure yourselves that the sun is ready to rise.

8. According to the tenor of the covenant of grace, a man may be sensible of *the respect of affliction unto sin,* yea, unto this or that sin in particular, and yet have a comfortable persuasion of the forgiveness of sin. Thus it was in general in God's dealing with his people. He "forgave them," but he "took vengeance of their inventions," Ps. xcix. 8. Whatever they suffered under the vengeance that fell upon their inventions (and that is as hard a word as is applied anywhere unto God's dealing with his people), yet, at the same time, he assured them of the pardon of their sin. So, you know, was the case of David. His greatest trial and affliction, and that which befell him on the account of a particular sin, and wherein God took vengeance on his invention, was ushered in with a word of grace,—that God had done away or pardoned his sin, and that he should not die. This is expressed in the tenor of the covenant with the seed of Christ, Ps. lxxxix. 31–34.

Digitized by Google

Objections against believing from things internal—The person knows not whether he be regenerate or no—State of regeneration asserted—Difference of saving and common grace—This difference discernible—Men may know themselves to be regenerate—The objection answered.

ANOTHER head of objections and despondencies ariseth from things *internal*,—things that are required in the soul, that it may have an interest in the forgiveness that is with God, some whereof we shall speak unto. And these respect, first, the *state* of the soul; and, secondly, some *actings* in the soul.

First, As to the *state*. Say some, "*Unless a man be regenerate* and born again, he is not, he cannot be made partaker of mercy and pardon. Now, all things here are in the dark unto us; for, first, we know not well what this regeneration is, and it is variously disputed amongst men. Some would place it only in the outward signs of our initiation into Christ, and some otherwise express it. Again, it is uncertain whether those that are regenerate do or may know that they are so, or whether this may be in any measure known unto others with whom they may treat about it. And if it may not be known, we must be uncertain in this also. And then, it may be, for their parts, they neither know the time when, nor the manner how, any such work was wrought in them; and yet, without this, seeing it is wrought by means, and springs from certain causes, they can have no establishment in a not-failing persuasion of their acceptance with God by the pardon of their sins in the blood of Christ." This is the head and sum of most of the objections which perplexed souls do manage against themselves as to their state and condition. Hence, indeed, they draw forth reasonings with great variety, according as they are suggested by their particular occasions and temptations. And many proofs, taken from their sins, miscarriages, and fears, do they enforce their objections withal. My purpose is, to lay down some general rules and principles, which may be applied unto particular occasions and emergencies; and this shall be done in answer to the several parts of the general objection mentioned before. I say, then,—

1. It is most certain that there are *two estates* and conditions that divide all mankind, and every one that lives in the world doth completely and absolutely belong unto one of them. These are, the state of nature and the state of grace,—of sin and of righteousness by Christ. Every man in the world belongs unto one of these states or conditions. This the Scripture so abounds in that it seems to be the first principal thing that we are taught in it. It is as clear that there are two different states in this world as that there are so in

Digitized by Google

that to come. Yea, all our faith and obedience depend on this truth; and not only so, but the covenant of God, the mediation of Christ, and all the promises and threats of the law and gospel, are built on this supposition. And this lays naked unto a spiritual eye that abounding atheism that is in the world. Men are not only, like Nicodemus, ignorant of these things, and wonder how they can be, but they scorn them, despise them, scoff at them. To make mention of being regenerate is exposed to reproach in the world. But whether men will or no, unto one of these conditions they must belong.

2. As these two estates differ *morally* in themselves, and *physically* in the causes constitutive of that difference, so there is a specifical difference between the things that place men in the one condition and in the other. Whatever there is of goodness, virtue, duty, grace, in an unregenerate person, there is in him that is regenerate somewhat of another kind that is not in the other at all. For the difference of these states themselves, it is plain in Scripture;—the one is a state of death, the other of life; the one of darkness, the other of light; the one of enmity against God, the other of reconciliation with him. And that the one state is constituted by that of grace, which is of a peculiar kind, and which is not in the other, I shall briefly declare:—

(1.) The grace of regeneration proceedeth from an *especial spring* and fountain, which emptieth much of its living waters into it, no one drop whereof falls on them that are not regenerate. This is electing love; it is given out in the pursuit of the decree of election: "God hath chosen us that we should be holy," Eph. i. 4. Our holiness, whose only spring is our regeneration, is an effect of our election,—that which God works in our souls, in the pursuit of his eternal purpose of love and good-will towards us. So again saith the apostle, 2 Thess. ii. 13, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit." God having designed us unto salvation as the end, hath also appointed the sanctification of the Spirit to be the means to bring us orderly unto the attainment of that end. But the best of common grace or gifts that may be in men unregenerate are but products of the providence of God, ordering all things in general unto his own glory and the good of them that shall be heirs of salvation. They are not fruits of electing eternal love, nor designed means for the infallible attaining of eternal salvation.

(2.) The graces of those that are regenerate have a manifold respect or *relation to the Lord Christ*, that the common graces of others have not. I shall name one or two of these respects:—First, They have an especial *moral relation* to the mediatory acts of Christ

Digitized by Google

in his oblation and intercession. Especial grace is an especial part of the purchase of Christ by his death and blood-shedding. He made a double purchase of his elect;—of their persons, to be his; of especial grace, to be theirs: "He gave himself for the church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it unto himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish," Eph. v. 25–27. The design of Christ in giving himself for his church was, to procure for it that especial grace whereby, through the use of means, it might be regenerate, sanctified, and purified: so Tit. ii. 14, "He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Real purification in grace and holiness hath this especial relation unto the death of Christ, that he designed therein to procure it for them for whom he died; and in the pursuit of his purchase or acquisition of it, his purpose was really to bestow it upon them, or effectually to work it in them. Moreover, it hath an especial relation unto his intercession, and that in a distinguishing manner from any other gifts or common graces that other men may receive. Giving us the rule and pattern of his intercession, John xvii., he tells us that he so prays not for the world, but for his elect,—those which the Father had given him; because they were his, verse 9. And what is it that he prays for them, in distinction from all other men whatever? Amongst others this is one principal thing that he insists on, verse 17, "Sanctify them through thy truth." Their sanctification and holiness is granted upon that prayer and intercession of Christ; which is peculiar unto them, with an exclusion of all others: "I pray for them; I pray not for the world." Now, the common grace of unregenerate persons, whereby they are distinguished from other men, whatever it be, it hath not this especial relation to the oblation and intercession of Christ. Common grace is not the procurement of especial intercession.

Secondly, They have a real relation unto Christ, as he is the *living, quickening head* of the church; for he is so, even the living spiritual fountain of the spiritual life of it, and of all vital acts whatever: "Christ is our life; and our life is hid with him in God," Col. iii. 2, 3. That eternal life which consists in the knowledge of the Father and the Son, John xvii. 3, is in him as the cause, head, spring, and fountain of it. In him it is in its fulness, and from thence it is derived unto all that believe, who receive from his fulness "grace for grace," John i. 16. All true, saving, sanctifying grace, all spiritual life, and every thing that belongs thereunto, is derived directly from Christ, as the living head of his church and fountain of all spiritual life unto them. This the apostle expresseth,

Digitized by Google

Eph. iv. 15, 16, "Speaking the truth in love, grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." To the same purpose he again expresseth the same matter, Col. ii. 19. All grace in the whole body comes from the head, Christ Jesus; and there is no growth or furtherance of it but by his effectual working in every part, to bring it unto the measure designed unto it. Nothing, then, no, not the least of this grace, can be obtained but by virtue of our union unto Christ as our head; because it consists in a vital, effectual influence from him and his fulness. And this kind of relation unto Christ, all grace that is or may be in unregenerate men is incapable of.

(3.) The grace of regeneration and the fruits of it are *administered in and by the covenant.* This is the promise of the covenant, that God will write his law in our hearts, and put his fear in our inward parts, that we shall not depart from him, Jer. xxxi. This is that grace whereof we speak, whatever it be, or of what kind soever. It is bestowed on none but those who are taken into covenant with God; for unto them alone it is promised, and by virtue thereof is it wrought in and upon their souls. Now, all unregenerate men are strangers from the covenant, and are not made partakers of that grace which is peculiarly and only promised thereby and exhibited therein.

(4.) *The least spark of saving, regenerating grace is wrought in the soul by the Holy Ghost,* as given unto men to dwell in them and to abide with them. He is the water given by Jesus Christ unto believers, which is in them "a well of water springing up into everlasting life," John iv. 14. First they receive the water, the spring itself,—that is, the Holy Spirit,—and from thence living waters do arise up in them; they are wrought, effected, produced by the Spirit, which is given unto them. Now, although the common gifts and graces of men unregenerate are effects of the power of the Holy Ghost wrought in them and bestowed on them, as are all other works of God's providence, yet it doth not work in them, as received by them, to dwell in them and abide with them, as a never-failing spring of spiritual life; for our Saviour says expressly that the world, or unbelievers, do not know the Spirit, nor can receive him, or have him abiding in them;—all which, in a contradistinction unto all unregenerate persons, are affirmed of all them that do believe.

(5.) The least of saving grace, such as is peculiar unto them that are regenerate, is spirit: John iii. 6, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Whatever it is that is so born, it is spirit; it hath a spiritual being, and it is not educible by any means out of the principles of

Digitized by Google

nature. So it is said to be a "new creature," 2 Cor. v. 17. Be it never so little or so great, however it may differ in degrees in one and in another, yet the nature of it is the same in all,—it is a "new creature." As the least worm of the earth, in the order of the old creation, is no less a creature than the sun, yea, or the most glorious angel in heaven; so, in the order of the new creation, the least spark or dram of true grace that is from the sanctifying Spirit is a new creature, no less than the highest faith or love that ever was in the chiefest of the apostles. Now, that which is spirit, and that which is not spirit,—that which hath a new spiritual being, and that which hath none,—whatever appearance of agreement there may be among them, do yet differ specifically from one another. And thus it is with the saving grace that is in a regenerate, and those common graces that are in others which are not so. So that as these are divers states, so they are eminently different and distinct the one from the other. And this answers the second thing laid down in the objections taken from the uncertainty of these states and of regeneration itself, and the real difference of it from the contrary state, which is exclusive of an interest in forgiveness.

3. This is laid down in the inquiry, "*Whether this state may be known unto him who is really partaker of it* or translated into it, or unto others that may be concerned therein?" To which I say, The difference that is between these two states, and the constitutive causes of them, as it is real, so it is discernible. It may be known by themselves who are in those states, and others. It may be known who are born of God, and who are yet children of the devil,—who are quickened by Christ, and who are yet "dead in trespasses and sins." But here also observe,—

(1.) That I do not say this is *always known to the persons themselves* concerned in this distribution. Many cry, "Peace, peace," when sudden destruction is at hand. These either think themselves regenerate when they are not, or else wilfully despise the consideration of what is required in them that they may have peace, and so delude their own souls unto their ruin. And many that are truly born of God yet know it not; they may for a season walk in darkness, and have no light. Nor,—

(2.) That this is *always known to others.* It is not known unto unregenerate men in respect of them that are so; for they know not really and substantially what it is to be so. Natural men perceive not the things of God; that is, spiritually, in their own light and nature, 1 Cor. ii. And as they cannot aright discern the things which put men into that condition (for they are foolishness unto them), so they cannot judge aright of their persons in whom they are. And if they do at any time judge aright notionally concerning any things or

Digitized by Google

persons, yet they do not judge so upon right grounds, nor with any evidence in or unto themselves of what they do judge. Wherefore generally they judge amiss of such persons; and because they make profession of somewhat which they find not in themselves, they judge them hypocrites, and false pretenders unto what is not: for those things which evince their union with Christ, and which evidence their being born of God, they savour them not, nor can receive them. Nor is this always known unto or discerned by them that are regenerate. They may sometimes, with Peter, think Simon Magus to be a true believer, or, with Eli, an Hannah to be a daughter of Belial. Many hypocrites are set forth with gifts, common graces, light, and profession, so that they pass amongst all believers for such as are born of God; and many poor saints may be so disguised, under darkness, temptation, sin, as to be looked on as strangers from that family whereunto indeed they do belong. The judgment of man may fail, but the judgment of God is according unto righteousness. Wherefore,—

(3.) This is that we say, *It may be known, in the sedulous use of means appointed for that end, to a man's self and others, which of the conditions mentioned he doth belong unto,*—that is, whether he be regenerate or no,—so far as his or their concernment lies therein. This, I say, may be known, and that infallibly and assuredly, with reference unto any duty wherein from hence we are concerned. The discharge of some duties in ourselves and towards others depends on this knowledge; and therefore we may attain it so far as it is necessary for the discharge of such duties unto the glory of God. Now, because it is not directly in our way, yet having been mentioned, I shall briefly, in our passage, touch upon the latter, or what duties do depend upon our judging of others to be regenerate, and the way or principles whereby such a judgment may be made:—

[1.] There are many duties incumbent on us to be performed with and towards professors, which, without admitting a judgment to be made of their state and condition, cannot be performed in faith. And in reference unto these duties alone it is that we are called to judge the state of others; for we are not giving countenance unto a rash, uncharitable censuring of men's spiritual conditions, nor unto any judging of any men, any other than what our own duty towards them doth indispensably require. Thus, if we are to "lay down our lives for the brethren," it is very meet we should so far know them so to be as that we may hazard our lives in faith when we are called thereunto. We are also to join with them in those ordinances wherein we make a solemn profession that we are members of the same body with them, that we have the same Head, the same Spirit, faith, and love. We must love them because they are begotten of God,

Digitized by Google

children of our heavenly Father; and therefore must on some good ground believe them so to be. In a word, the due performance of all principal mutual gospel duties, to the glory of God and our own edification, depends on this supposition, that we may have such a satisfying persuasion concerning the spiritual condition of others as that from thence we may take our aim in what we do.

[2.] For the grounds hereof I shall mention one only, which all others do lean upon. This is pressed, 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13, "As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." They are all united unto and hold of one head; for as are the members of the body natural, under one head, so is Christ mystical, that is, all believers, under Christ their head. And this union they have by the inhabitation of the same quickening Spirit which is in Christ their head; and by him they are brought all into the same spiritual state and frame,—they are made to drink into one and the same Spirit: for this same Spirit produceth the same effects in them all,—the same in kind, though differing in degrees,—as the apostle fully declares, Eph. iv. 3–6. And this Spirit is in them, and not in the world, John xvi. And as this gives them a naturalness in their duties one towards another, or in mutual caring for, rejoicing or sorrowing with, one another, as members one of another, 1 Cor. xii. 25, 26; so it reveals and discovers them to each other so far as is necessary for the performance of the duties mentioned, in such a manner as becomes members of the same body. There is on this account a spiritually natural answering of one to another, as face answereth face in the water. They can see and discern that in others whereof they have experience in themselves,—they can taste and relish that in others which they feed upon in themselves, and wherein the lives of their souls do consist; the same Spirit of life being in them, they have the same spiritual taste and savour. And unless their palates are distempered by temptations, or false opinions, or prejudices, they can in their communion taste of that Spirit in each other which they are all made to drink into. This gives them the same likeness and image in the inward man, the same heavenly light in their minds, the same affections; and being thus prepared and enabled to judge and discern of the state of each other, in reference unto their mutual duties, they have, moreover, the true rule of the word to judge of all spirits and spiritual effects by. And this is the ground of all that love without dissimulation and real communion that is among the saints of God in this world. But here two cautions must be allowed:—

Digitized by Google

(1*st.*) *That we would not judge the state and condition of any men in the world,*—no farther than we are called thereunto in a way of duty; and we are so called only with reference unto the duties that we are to perform towards them. What have we to do to judge them that are without,—that is, any one that we have not a call to consider in reference unto our own duty? Herein that great rule takes place, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." Let us leave all men, the worst of men, unless where evident duty requires other actings, to the judgment-seat of God. They are the servants of another, and they stand or fall unto their own master. There have been great miscarriages amongst us in this matter; some have been ready to condemn all that go not along with them in every principle, yea, opinion or practice. And every day slight occasions and provocations are made the grounds and reasons of severe censures; but nothing is more contrary to the conduct of the meek and holy spirit of Christ. This is our rule:—Are we called to act towards any as saints, as living members of the body of Christ, and that in such duties as we cannot perform in faith unless we are persuaded that so they are?—then are we, on the grounds and by the ways before mentioned, to satisfy ourselves in one another.

(2*dly.*) Do we endeavour mutually to discern the condition of one another in reference unto such ends?—*let us be sure to look unto and pursue those ends when we have attained our satisfaction.* What these ends are hath been showed. It is, that we may love them without dissimulation, as members of the same mystical body with us; that we may naturally take care of them, and for them; that we may delight sincerely in them; that we may minister unto their wants, temporal and spiritual; that we may watch over them with pity and compassion. These and the like are the only ends for which we are at any time called to the consideration of the spiritual condition of one another; if these be neglected, the other is useless. And here lies a great aggravation of that neglect, in that such a way is made for the avoidance of it. Here lies the life or death of all church society. All church society and relation is built on this supposition, that the members of it are all regenerate. Some lay this foundation in baptism only, professing that all that are baptized are regenerate; others require a farther satisfaction, in the real work itself; but all build on the same foundation,—that all church members are to be regenerate. And to what end is this? Namely, that they may all mutually perform those duties one towards another which are incumbent mutually on regenerate persons. If these are omitted, there is an end of all profitable use of church society. Churches without this are but mere husks and shells of churches, carcases without souls; for as there is no real union unto Christ without faith, so there is

Digitized by Google

no real union among the members of any church without love, and that acting itself in all the duties mentioned. Let not this ordinance be in vain.

But we must return from this digression to that which lies before us, which is concerning what a man may discern concerning his own being regenerate or born again. I say, then,—

Secondly, *Men may come to an assured, satisfactory persuasion that themselves are regenerate,* and that such as is so far infallible as that it will not deceive them when it is brought to the trial. For there are many duties whose performance in faith, unto the glory of God and the edification of our own souls, doth depend on this persuasion and conviction; as,—

1. *A due sense of our relation unto God,* and an answerable comportment of our spirits and hearts towards him. He that is born again is born of God; he is begotten of God by the immortal seed of the word. Without a persuasion hereof, how can a man on grounds of faith carry himself towards God as his Father? And how great a part of our obedience towards him and communion with him depends hereon, we all know. If men fluctuate all their days in this matter, if they come to no settlement in it, no comfortable persuasion of it, they scarce ever act any genuine child-like acts of love or delight towards God, which exceedingly impeacheth their whole obedience.

2. *Thankfulness for grace received* is one of the principal duties that is incumbent on believers in this world. Now, how can a man in faith bless God for that which he is utterly uncertain whether he have received it from him or no? I know some men run on in a rote in this matter. They will bless God in a formal way for regeneration, sanctification, justification, and the like; but if you ask them whether themselves are regenerate or no, they will be ready to scoff at it, or at least to profess that they know no such thing. What is this but to mock God, and in a presumptuous manner to take his name in vain? But if we will praise God as we ought for his grace, as we are guided and directed in the Scripture, as the nature of the matter requires, with such a frame of heart as may influence our whole obedience, surely it cannot but be our duty to know the grace that we have received.

3. Again: *the main of our spiritual watch and diligence* consisteth in the cherishing, improving, and increasing of the grace that we have received, the strengthening of the new creature that is wrought in us. Herein consists principally the life of faith, and the exercise of that spiritual wisdom which faith furnisheth the soul withal. Now, how can any man apply himself hereunto whilst he is altogether uncertain whether he hath received any principle of

Digitized by Google

living, saving grace, or no? Whereas, therefore, God requires our utmost diligence, watchfulness, and care in this matter, it is certain that he requires also of us, and grants unto us, that which is the foundation of all these duties, which lies in an acquaintance with that state and condition whereunto we do belong. In brief, there is nothing we have to do, in reference unto eternity, but one way or other it hath a respect unto our light and convictions, as to our state and condition in this world; and those who are negligent in the trial and examination thereof do leave all things between God and their souls at absolute uncertainties and dubious hazards, which is not to lead the life of faith.

We shall now, upon these premises, return unto that part of the objection which is under consideration. Say some, "We know not whether we are regenerate or no, and are therefore altogether uncertain whether we have an interest in that forgiveness that is with God; nor dare we, on that account, admit of the consolation that is tendered on the truth insisted on."

Supposing what hath been spoken in general, I shall lay down the grounds of resolving this perplexing doubt in the ensuing rules:—

Rule I.

See that the persuasion and assurance hereof which you look after and desire be regular, and not such as is suited merely unto your own imaginations. Our second and third general rules about the nature of all spiritual assurance, and what is consistent therewithal, are here to be taken into consideration. If you look to have such an evidence, light into, and absolute conviction of, this matter, as shall admit of no doubts, fears, questionings, just occasions and causes of new trials, teachings, and self-examinations, you will be greatly deceived. Regeneration induceth a new principle into the soul, but it doth not utterly expel the old; some would have security, not assurance. The principle of sin and unbelief will still abide in us, and still work in us. Their abiding and their acting must needs put the soul upon a severe inquiry, whether they are not prevalent in it beyond what the condition of regeneration will admit. The constant conflicts we must have with sin will not suffer us to have always so clear an evidence of our condition as we would desire. Such a persuasion as is prevalent against strong objections to the contrary, keeping up the heart to a due performance of those duties in faith which belong unto the state of regeneration, is the substance of what in this kind you are to look after.

Digitized by Google

Rule II.

If you are doubtful concerning your state and condition, do not expect an extraordinary determination of it by an immediate testimony of the Spirit of God. I do grant that God doth sometimes, by this means, bring in peace and satisfaction unto the soul. He gives his own Spirit immediately "to bear witness with ours that we are the children of God," both upon the account of regeneration and adoption. He doth so; but, as far as we can observe, in a way of sovereignty, when and to whom he pleaseth. Besides, that men may content and satisfy themselves with his ordinary teachings, consolations, and communications of his grace, he hath left the nature of that peculiar testimony of the Spirit very dark and difficult to be found out, few agreeing wherein it doth consist or what is the nature of it. No one man's experience is a rule unto others, and an undue apprehension of it is a matter of great danger. Yet it is certain that humble souls in extraordinary cases may have recourse unto it with benefit and relief thereby. This, then, you may desire, you may pray for, but not with such a frame of spirit as to refuse that other satisfaction which in the ways of truth and peace you may find. This is the putting of the hand into the side of Christ; but "blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Rule III.

If you have at any time formerly received any especial or immediate pledge or testimony of God, given unto your souls as unto their sincerity, and consequently their regeneration, labour to recover it, and to revive a sense of it upon your spirits now in your darkness and trouble. I am persuaded there are but few believers, but that God doth, at one time or other, in one duty or other, entering into or coming out of one temptation or another, give some singular testimony unto their own souls and consciences concerning their sincerity and his acceptance of them. Sometimes he doth this in a duty, wherein he hath enabled the soul to make so near an approach unto him as that it hath been warmed, enlivened, sweetened, satisfied with the presence, the gracious presence, of God, and which God hath made unto him as a token of his uprightness;—sometimes, when a man is entering into any great temptation, trial, difficult or dangerous duty, that death itself is feared in it, God comes in, by one means or other, by a secret intimation of his love, which he

Digitized by Google

gives him to take along with him for his furniture and provision in his way, and thereby testifies to him his sincerity; and this serves, like the food of Elijah, for forty days in a wilderness condition;—sometimes he is pleased to shine immediately into the soul in the midst of its darkness and sorrow; wherewith it is surprised, as not looking for any such expression of kindness, and is thereby relieved against its own pressing self-condemnation;—and sometimes the Lord is pleased to give these tokens of love unto the soul as its refreshment, when it is coming off from the storm of temptations wherewith it has been tossed. And many other times and seasons there are wherein God is pleased to give unto believers some especial testimony in their consciences unto their own integrity. But now these are all wrought by a transient operation of the Spirit, exciting and enabling the heart unto a spiritual, sensible apprehension and receiving of God's expressing kindness towards it. These things abide not in their sense and in their power which they have upon our affections, but immediately pass away. They are, therefore, to be treasured up in the mind and judgment, to be improved and made use of by faith, as occasion shall require. But we are apt to lose them. Most know no other use of them but whilst they feel them; yea, through ignorance in our duty to improve them, they prove like a sudden light brought into a dark place and again removed, which seems to increase, and really aggravates, our sense of the darkness. The true use of them is, to lay them up and ponder them in our hearts, that they may be supportments and testimonies unto us in a time of need. Have you, then, who are now in the dark as to your state or condition, whether you are regenerate or no, ever received any such refreshing and cheering testimony from God given unto your integrity, and your acceptance with him thereupon? Call it over again, and make use of it against those discouragements which arise from your present darkness in this matter, and which keep you off from sharing in the consolation tendered unto you in this word of grace.

Rule IV.

A due spiritual consideration of the causes and effects of regeneration is the ordinary way and means whereby the souls of believers come to be satisfied concerning that work of God in them and upon them. The principle or *causes* of this work are, the Spirit and the word. He that is born again, "is born of the Spirit," John iii. 6; and of the word, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth,"

Digitized by Google

James i. 18; "We are born again by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever," 1 Pet. i. 23. Wherever, then, a man is regenerate, there hath been an effectual work of the Spirit and of the word upon the soul. This is to be inquired into and after. Ordinarily it will discover itself. Such impressions will be made in it upon the soul, such a change will be wrought and produced in it, as will not escape a spiritual diligent search and inquiry. And this is much of the duty of such as are in the dark, and uncertain concerning the accomplishment of this work in themselves. Let them call to mind what have been the actings of the Spirit by the word upon their souls; what light thereby hath been communicated unto their minds; what discoveries of the Lord Christ and way of salvation have been made to them; what sense and detestation of sin have been wrought in them; what satisfaction hath been given unto the soul, to choose, accept, and acquiesce in the righteousness of Christ; what resignation of the heart unto God, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, it hath been wrought unto. Call to mind what transactions there have been between God and your souls about these things; how far they have been carried on; whether you have broken off the treaty with God, and refused his terms, or if not, where the stay is between you; and what is the reason, since God hath graciously begun to deal thus with you, that you are not yet come to a thorough close with him in the work and design of his grace? The defect must of necessity lie on your parts. God doth nothing in vain. Had he not been willing to receive you, he would not have dealt with you so far as he hath done. There is nothing, then, remains to firm your condition but a resolved act of your own wills in answering the mind and will of God. And by this search may the soul come to satisfaction in this matter, or at least find out and discover where the stick is whence their uncertainty doth arise, and what is wanting to complete their desire.

Again: this work may be discovered by its *effects*. There is something that is produced by it in the soul, which may also be considered either with respect unto its being and existence, or unto its actings and operations. In the first regard it is spirit: John iii. 6, "That which is born of the Spirit," which is produced by the effectual operation of the Spirit of God, it "is spirit,"—"a new creature," 2 Cor. v 17. He that is in Christ Jesus, who is born again, is a new creature, a new life, a spiritual life, Gal. ii. 20; Eph. ii. 1. In brief, it is an habitual furnishment of all the faculties of the soul with new spiritual, vital principles, enabling a person in all instances of obedience to lead a spiritual life unto God. This principle is by this work produced in the soul. And in respect of its actings, it consists in all the gracious operations of the mind, will, heart, or affec-

Digitized by Google

tions, in the duties of obedience which God hath required of us This is that which gives life unto our duties (without which the best of our works are but dead works), and renders them acceptable unto the living God. It is not my business at large to pursue and declare these things; I only mention them, that persons who are kept back from a participation of the consolation tendered from the forgiveness that is with God, because they cannot comfortably conclude that they are born again, as knowing that it is such persons alone unto whom these consolations do truly and really belong, may know how to make a right judgment of themselves. Let such persons, then, not fluctuate up and down in generals and uncertainties, with heartless complaints, which is the ruin of the peace of their souls; but let them really put things to the trial, by the examination of the causes and effects of the work they inquire after. It is by the use of such means whereby God will be pleased to give them all the assurance and establishment concerning their state and condition which is needful for them, and which may give them encouragement in their course of obedience.

But supposing all that hath been spoken, what if a man, by the utmost search and inquiry that he is able to make, cannot attain any satisfactory persuasion that indeed this great work of God's grace hath passed upon his soul; is this a sufficient ground to keep him off from accepting of supportment and consolation from this truth, that there is forgiveness with God? which is the design of the objection laid down before. I say therefore farther, that,—

1. *Regeneration doth not in order of time precede the soul's interest in the forgiveness that is with God,* or its being made partaker of the pardon of sin. I say no more but that it doth not precede it in order of time, not determining which hath precedency in order of nature. That, I confess, which the method of the gospel leads unto is, that absolution, acquitment, or the pardon of sin, is the foundation of the communication of all saving grace unto the soul, and so precedeth all grace in the sinner whatever. But because this absolution or pardon of sin is to be received by faith, whereby the soul is really made partaker of it and all the benefits belonging thereunto, and that faith is the radical grace which we receive in our regeneration,—for it is by faith that our hearts are purified, as an instrument in the hand of the great purifier, the Spirit of God,—I place these two together, and shall not dispute as to their priority in nature; but in time the one doth not precede the other.

2. It is hence evident, that *an assurance of being regenerate is no way previously necessary unto the believing of an interest in forgiveness;* so that although a man have not the former, it is, or may be, his duty to endeavour the latter. When convinced persons

Digitized by Google

cried out, "What shall we do to be saved?" the answer was, "Believe, and ye shall be so." "Believe in Christ, and in the remission of sin by his blood," is the first thing that convinced sinners are called unto. They are not directed first to secure their souls that they are born again, and then afterward to believe; but they are first to believe that the remission of sin is tendered unto them in the blood of Christ, and that "by him they may be justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law." Nor upon this proposition is it the duty of men to question whether they have faith or no, but actually to believe. And faith in its operation will evidence itself. See Acts xiii. 38, 39. Suppose, then, that you do not know that you are regenerate, that you are born of God,—that you have no prevailing, refreshing, constant evidence or persuasion thereof,—should this hinder you? should this discourage you from believing forgiveness, from closing with the promises, and thereby obtaining in yourselves an interest in that forgiveness that is with God? Not at all; nay, this ought exceedingly to excite and stir you up unto your duty herein: for,—

(1.) Suppose that it is *otherwise*,—that, indeed, you are yet in the state of sin, and are only brought under the power of light and conviction,—this is the way for a translation into an estate of spiritual life and grace. If you will forbear the acting of faith upon and for forgiveness until you are regenerate, you may, and probably you will, come short both of forgiveness and regeneration also. Here lay your foundation, and then your building will go on. This will open the door unto you, and give you an entrance into the kingdom of God. Christ is the door; do not think to climb up over the wall; enter by him, or you will be kept out.

(2.) Suppose that you are born again, but yet *know it not*,—as is the condition of many,—this is a way whereby you may receive an evidence thereof. It is good, the embracing of all signs, tokens, and pledges of our spiritual condition, and it is so to improve them; but the best course is, to follow the genuine natural actings of faith, which will lead us into the most settled apprehensions concerning our relation unto God and acceptance with him. Believe first the forgiveness of sin as the effect of mere grace and mercy in Christ. Let the faith hereof be nourished and strengthened in your souls. This will insensibly influence your hearts into a comforting gospel persuasion of your state and condition towards God; which will be accompanied with assured rest and peace.

To wind up this discourse:—Remember that that which hath been spoken with reference unto the state of regeneration in general may be applied unto every particular objection or cause of fear and discouragement that may be reduced to that head. Such are all ob-

Digitized by Google

jections that arise from particular sins, from aggravations of sins by their greatness or circumstances, or relapses into them. The way that the consideration of these things prevails upon the mind unto fear, is by begetting an apprehension in men that they are not regenerate; for if they were, they suppose they could not be so overtaken or entangled. The rules thereof laid down are suited to the straits of the souls of sinners in all such particular cases.

Lastly, There was somewhat in particular added in the close of the objection, which, although it be not directly in our way nor of any great importance in itself, yet having been mentioned, it is not unmeet to remove it out of the way, that it may not leave entanglement upon the minds of any. Now this is, that some know not nor can give an account of *the time of their conversion* unto God, and therefore cannot be satisfied that the saving work of his grace hath passed upon them. This is usually and ordinarily spoken unto; and I shall therefore briefly give an account concerning it:—

1. It hath been showed that, in this matter, there are many things whereon we may *regularly* found a judgment concerning ourselves, and it is great folly to waive them all, and put the issue of the matter upon *one circumstance*. If a man have a trial at law, wherein he hath many evidences speaking for him, only one circumstance is dubious and in question, he will not cast the weight of his cause on that disputed circumstance, but will plead those evidences that are more clear and testify more fully in his behalf. I will not deny but that this matter of the time of conversion is ofttimes an important circumstance,—in the affirmative, when it is known, it is of great use, tending to stability and consolation;—but yet it is still but a circumstance, such as that the being of the thing itself doth not depend upon. He that is alive may know that he was born, though he know neither the place where nor the time when he was so; and so may he that is spiritually alive, and hath ground of evidence that he is so, that he was born again, though he know neither when, nor where, nor how. And this case is usual in persons of quiet natural tempers, who have had the advantage of education under means of light and grace. God ofttimes, in such persons, begins and carries on the work of his grace insensibly, so that they come to good growth and maturity before they know that they are alive. Such persons come at length to be satisfied in saying, with the blind man in the gospel, "How our eyes were opened we know not; only one thing we know, whereas we were blind by nature, now we see."

2. Even in this matter also, we must, it may be, be content to live by faith, and to believe as well what God hath done *in us*, if it be the matter and subject of his promises, as what he hath done *for us;* the ground whereof also is the promise, and nothing else.

Digitized by Google

Objections from the present state and condition of the soul—Weakness and imperfection of duty—Opposition from indwelling sin.

THIRDLY. There is another head of objections against the soul's receiving consolation from an interest in forgiveness, arising from the consideration of its present state and condition as to actual holiness, duties, and sins. Souls complain, when in darkness and under temptations, that they cannot find that holiness, nor those fruits of it in themselves, which they suppose an interest in pardoning mercy will produce. Their hearts they find are weak, and all their *duties worthless.* If they were weighed in the balance, they would be all found too light. In the best of them there is such a mixture of *self, hypocrisy,* unbelief, vain-glory, that they are even ashamed and confounded with the remembrance of them. These things fill them with discouragements, so that they refuse to be comforted or to entertain any refreshing persuasion from the truth insisted on, but rather conclude that they are utter strangers from that forgiveness that is with God, and so continue helpless in their depths.

According unto the method proposed, and hitherto pursued, I shall only lay down some such general rules as may support a soul under the despondencies that are apt in such a condition to befall it, that none of these things may weaken it in its endeavour to lay hold of forgiveness. And,—

1. This is the proper place to put in execution our eighth rule, to take heed of *heartless complaints when vigorous actings of grace are expected at our hands.* If it be thus, indeed, why lie you on your faces? why do you not rise and put out yourselves to the utmost, giving all diligence to add one grace to another, until you find yourselves in a better frame? Supposing, then, the putting of that rule into practice, I add,—

(1.) That *known holiness is apt to degenerate into self-righteousness.* What God gives us on the account of sanctification we are ready enough to reckon on the score of justification. It is a hard thing to feel grace, and to believe as if there were none. We have so much of the Pharisee in us by nature, that it is sometimes well that our good is hid from us. We are ready to take our corn and wine and bestow them on other lovers. Were there not in our hearts a spiritually sensible principle of corruption, and in our duties a discernible mixture of self, it would be impossible we should walk so humbly as is required of them who hold communion with God in a covenant of grace and pardoning mercy. It is a good life which is attended with a faith of righteousness and a sense of corruption. Whilst I know Christ's righteousness, I shall the less care to know

Digitized by Google

my own holiness. To *be holy* is necessary; to *know it*, sometimes a temptation.

(2.) *Even duties of God's appointment, when turned into self-righteousness, are God's great abhorrency*, Isa. lxvi. 2, 3. What hath a good original may be vitiated by a bad end.

(3.) Oftentimes *holiness in the heart is more known by the opposition that is made there to it, than by its own prevalent working.* The Spirit's operation is known by the flesh's opposition. We find a man's strength by the burdens he carries, and not the pace that he goes. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" is a better evidence of grace and holiness than "God, I thank thee I am not as other men." A heart pressed, grieved, burdened, not by the guilt of sin only, which reflects with trouble on an awakened conscience, but by the close, adhering power of indwelling sin, tempting, seducing, soliciting, hindering, captivating, conceiving, restlessly disquieting, may from thence have as clear an evidence of holiness as from a delightful fruit-bearing. What is it that is troubled and grieved in thee? what is it that seems to be almost killed and destroyed; that cries out, complains, longs for deliverance? Is it not the new creature? is it not the principle of spiritual life, whereof thou art partaker? I speak not of troubles and disquietments for sin committed; nor of fears and perturbations of mind lest sin should break forth to loss, shame, ruin, dishonour; nor of the contending of a convinced conscience lest damnation should ensue;—but of the striving of the Spirit against sin, out of a hatred and a loathing of it, upon all the mixed considerations of love, grace, mercy, fear, the beauty of holiness, excellency of communion with God, that are proposed in the gospel. If thou seemest to thyself to be only passive in these things, to do nothing but to endure the assaults of sin; yet if thou art sensible, and standest under the stroke of it as under the stroke of an enemy, there is the root of the matter. And as it is thus as to the substance and being of holiness, so it is also as to the degrees of it. Degrees of holiness are to be measured more by opposition than self-operation. He may have more grace than another who brings not forth so much fruit as the other, because he hath more opposition, more temptation, Isa. xli. 17. And sense of the want of all is a great sign of somewhat in the soul.

2. As to what was alleged as to the nothingness, the selfishness of duty, I say, it is certain, whilst we are in the flesh, our duties will taste of the vessel whence they proceed. Weakness, defilements, treachery, hypocrisy, will attend them. To this purpose, whatever some pretend to the contrary, is the complaint of the church, Isa. lxiv. 6. The chaff oftentimes is so mixed with the wheat that corn can scarce be discerned. And this know, that the more spiritual any

Digitized by Google

man is, the more he sees of his unspiritualness in his spiritual duties. An outside performance will satisfy an outside Christian. Job abhorred himself most when he knew himself best. The clearer discoveries we have had of God, the viler will every thing of self appear. Nay, farther, duties and performances are oftentimes very ill measured by us; and those seem to be first which indeed are last, and those to be last which indeed are first. I do not doubt but a man, when he hath had distractions to wrestle withal, no outward advantage to farther him, no extraordinary provocation of hope, fear, or sorrow, on a natural account in his duty, may rise from his knees with thoughts that he hath done nothing in his duty but provoked God; when there hath been more workings of grace, in contending with the deadness cast on the soul by the condition that it is in, than when, by a concurrence of moved natural affections and outward provocations, a frame hath been raised that hath, to the party himself, seemed to reach to heaven: so that it may be this perplexity about duties is nothing but what is common to the people of God, and which ought to be no obstruction to peace and settlement.

3. As to the pretence of *hypocrisy*, you know what is usually answered. It is *one thing* to do a thing *in hypocrisy*, another not to do it *without a mixture of hypocrisy*. Hypocrisy, in its long extent, is every thing that, for matter or manner, comes short of sincerity. Now, our sincerity is no more perfect than our other graces; so that in its measure it abides with us and adheres to all we do. In like manner, it is one thing to do a thing for vain-glory and to be seen of men, another not to be able wholly to keep off the subtle insinuations of self and vain-glory. He that doth a thing in hypocrisy and for vain-glory is satisfied with some corrupt end obtained, though he be sensible that he sought such an end. He that doth a thing with a mixture of hypocrisy,—that is, with some breaches upon the degrees of his sincerity, with some insensible advancements in performance on outward considerations,—is not satisfied with a self-end obtained, and is dissatisfied with the defect of his sincerity. In a word, wouldst thou yet be sincere, and dost endeavour so to be in private duties, and in public performances,—in praying, hearing, giving alms, zealous actings for God's glory and the love of the saints; though these duties are not, it may be, sometimes done without sensible hypocrisy,—I mean, as traced to its most subtle insinuations of self and vain-glory, —yet are they not done in hypocrisy, nor do they denominate the persons by whom they are performed hypocrites. Yet I say of this, as of all that is spoken before, it is of use to relieve us under a troubled condition,—of none to support us or encourage us unto an abode in it.

4. *Know that God despiseth not small things.* He takes notice of the least breathings of our hearts after him, when we ourselves can

Digitized by Google

see nor perceive no such thing. He knows the mind of the Spirit in those workings which are never formed to that height that we can reflect upon them with our observation. Every thing that is of him is noted in his book, though not in ours. He took notice that, when Sarah was acting unbelief towards him, yet that she showed respect and regard to her husband, calling him "lord," Gen. xviii. 12; 1 Pet. iii. 6. And even whilst his people are sinning, he can find something in their hearts, words, or ways, that pleaseth him; much more in their duties. He is a skilful refiner, that can find much gold in that ore where we see nothing but lead or clay. He remembers the duties which we forget, and forgets the sins which we remember. He justifies our persons, though ungodly; and will also our duties, though not perfectly godly.

5. To give a little farther support in reference unto our wretched, miserable duties, and to them that are in perplexities on that account, know that *Jesus Christ takes whatever is evil and unsavoury out of them, and makes them acceptable.* When an unskilful servant gathers many herbs, flowers, and weeds in a garden, you gather them out that are useful, and cast the rest out of sight. Christ deals so with our performances. All the ingredients of self that are in them on any account he takes away, and adds incense to what remains, and presents it to God, Exod. xxx. 36. This is the cause that the saints at the last day, when they meet their own duties and performances, they know them not, they are so changed from what they were when they went out of their hand. "Lord, when saw we thee naked or hungry?" So that God accepts a little, and Christ makes our little a great deal.

6. Is this an argument to keep thee from believing? The reason why thou art no more holy is because thou hast no more faith. If thou hast no holiness, it is because thou hast no faith. Holiness is the purifying of the heart by faith, or our obedience unto the truth. And the reason why thou art no more in duty is, because thou art no more in believing. The reason why thy duties are weak and imperfect is, because thy faith is weak and imperfect. Hast thou no holiness?—believe, that thou mayst have. Hast thou but a little, or that which is imperceptible?—be steadfast in believing, that thou mayst abound in obedience. Do not resolve not to eat thy meat until thou art strong, when thou hast no means of being strong but by eating thy bread, which strengthens the heart of man.

OBJECTION FOURTH. The powerful tumultuating of indwelling sin or corruption is another cause of the same kind of trouble and despondency. "'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the lusts thereof.' But we find," say some, "several corruptions work-

Digitized by Google

ing effectually in our hearts, carrying us captive to the law of sin. They disquiet with their power as well as with their guilt. Had we been made partakers of the law of the Spirit of life, we had, ere this, been more set free from the law of sin and death. Had sin been pardoned fully, it would have been subdued more effectually."

There are three considerations which make the actings of indwelling sin to be so perplexing to the soul:—

1. Because they are *unexpected.* The soul looks not for them upon the first great conquest made of sin, and universal engagement of the heart unto God. When it first says, "I have sworn, and am steadfastly purposed to keep thy righteous judgments," commonly there is peace, at least for a season, from the disturbing vigorous actings of sin. There are many reasons why so it should be. "Old things are then passed away, all things are become new;" and the soul, under the power of that universal change, is utterly turned away from those things that should foment, stir up, provoke, or cherish, any lust or temptation. Now, when some of these advantages are past, and sin begins to stir and act again, the soul is surprised, and thinks the work that he hath passed through was not true and effectual, but temporary only; yea, he thinks, perhaps, that sin hath more strength than it had before, because he is more sensible than he was before. As one that hath a dead arm or limb, whilst it is mortified, endures deep cuts and lancings, and feels them not; so when spirits and sense are brought into the place again, he feels the least cut, and may think the instruments sharper than they were before, when all the difference is, that he hath got a quickness of sense, which before he had not. It may be so with a person in this case: he may think lust more powerful than it was before, because he is more sensible than he was before. Yea, sin in the heart is like a snake or serpent: you may pull out the sting of it, and cut it into many pieces; though it can sting mortally no more, nor move its whole body at once, yet it will move in all its parts, and make an appearance of a greater motion than formerly. So it is with lust: when it hath received its death's wound, and is cut to pieces, yet it moves in so many parts as it were in the soul, that it amazes him that hath to do with it; and thus coming unexpectedly, fills the spirit oftentimes with disconsolation.

2 It hath also in its actings a *universality.* This also surpriseth. There is a universality in the actings of sin, even in believers. There is no evil that it will not move to; there is no good that it will not attempt to hinder; no duty that it will not defile. And the reason of this is, because we are sanctified but in part; not in any part wholly, though savingly and truly in every part. There is sin remaining in every faculty, in all the affections, and so may be acting

Digitized by Google

in and towards any sin that the nature of man is liable unto. Degrees of sin there are that all regenerate persons are exempted from; but unto solicitations to all kinds of sin they are exposed: and this helps on the temptation.

3. It is *endless and restless*, never quiet, conquering nor conquered; it gives not over, but rebels being overcome, or assaults afresh having prevailed. Ofttimes after a victory obtained and an opposition subdued, the soul is in expectation of rest and peace from its enemies: but this holds not; it works and rebels again and again, and will do so whilst we live in this world, so that no issue will be put to our conflict but by death. This is at large handled elsewhere, in a treatise lately published on this peculiar subject.[1]

These and the like considerations attending the actings of indwelling sin, do oftentimes entangle the soul in making a judgment of itself, and leave it in the dark as to its state and condition.

A few things shall be offered unto this objection also:—

1. The sensible powerful actings of indwelling sin are not inconsistent with a state of grace, Gal. v. 17. There are in the same person contrary principles,—"the flesh and the Spirit;" these are contrary. And there are contrary actings from these principles,—"the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh;" and these actings are described to be greatly vigorous in other places. Lust wars against our souls, James iv. 1; 1 Pet. ii. 11. Now, to war is not to make faint or gentle opposition, to be slighted and contemned; but it is to go out with great strength, to use craft, subtlety, and force, so as to put the whole issue to a hazard. So these lusts war; such are their actings in and against the soul. And therefore, saith the apostle, "Ye cannot do the things that ye would." See Rom. vii. 14–17. In this conflict, indeed, the understanding is left unconquered, —it condemns and disapproves of the evil led unto; and the will is not subdued,—it would not do the evil that is pressed upon it; and there is a hatred or aversion remaining in the affections unto sin: but yet, notwithstanding, sin rebels, fights, tumultuates, and leads captive. This objection, then, may receive this speedy answer:—Powerful actings and workings, universal, endless strugglings of indwelling sin, seducing to all that is evil, putting itself forth to the disturbance and dissettlement of all that is good, are not sufficient ground to conclude a state of alienation from God. See for this the other treatise before mentioned at large.

2. *Your state is not at all to be measured by the opposition that sin makes to you, but by the opposition you make to it.* Be that never so great, if this be good,—be that never so restless and powerful, if this be sincere,—you may be disquieted, you can have no reason to despond.

[1] The author refers to his treatise on "Indwelling Sin," p. 153 of this volume.

Digitized by Google

I have mentioned these things only to give a specimen of the objections which men usually raise up against an actual closing with the truth insisted on to their consolation. And we have also given in upon them some rules of truth for their relief; not intending in them absolute satisfaction as to the whole of the cases mentioned, but only to remove the darkness raised by them so out of the way, as that it might not hinder any from mixing the word with faith that hath been dispensed from this blessed testimony, that "there is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared."

VERSES FIFTH AND SIXTH.

PROCEED we now to the second part of this psalm, which contains the deportment of a sin-perplexed soul, when by faith it hath discovered where its rest doth lie, and from whom its relief is to be expected; even from the forgiveness which is with God, whereof we have spoken.

There are two things in general, as was before mentioned, that the soul in that condition applies itself unto; whereof the first respects *itself*, and the other *the whole Israel of God.*

That which respects itself is the description of that frame of heart and spirit that he was brought into upon faith's discovery of forgiveness in God, with the duties that he applied himself unto, the grounds of it, and the manner of its performance, verses 5, 6:—

"I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning."

Herein, I say, he describes both his frame of spirit and the duty he applied himself to, both as to matter and manner.

I shall, as in the method hitherto observed, first consider the reading of the words, then their sense and importance, with the suitableness of the things mentioned in them to the condition of the soul under consideration; all which yield us a foundation of the observations that are to be drawn from them.

1. The words rendered strictly, or word for word, lie thus:—

"I have earnestly expected Jehovah; my soul hath expected, and in his word have I tarried," or waited. "My soul to the Lord more than" (or before) "the watchmen in the morning; the watchmen in the morning," or "unto the morning."

"I have waited" or "expected:" קִוִּיתִי from קָוָה, "to expect,"

Digitized by Google

"to hope," "to wait." "Verbum hoc est, magno animi desiderio in aliquem intentum esse, et respicere ad eum, ex eo pendere;"—"The word denotes to be intent on any one with great desire; to behold or regard him, and to depend upon him;" and it also expresseth the earnest inclination and intension of the will and mind.

Paul seems to have expressed this word to the full, Rom. viii. 19, by *ἀποκαραδοκία*,—an intent or earnest expectation, expressing itself by putting forth the head, and looking round about with earnestness and diligence. And this is also signified expressly by this word, Ps. lxix. 21, וָאֲקַוֶּה לָנוּד;—"And I looked for some to take pity." "Huc illuc anxiè circumspexi, siquis forte me commiseraturus esset;"—"I looked round about, this way and that way, diligently and solicitously, to see if any would pity me or lament with me."

Thus, "I have waited," is as much as, "I have diligently, with intension of soul, mind, will, and affections, looked unto God, in earnest expectation of that from him that I stand in need of, and which must come forth from the forgiveness that is with him."

2. "I have," saith he, "waited for, or expected Jehovah." He uses the same name of God in his expectation that he first fixed on in his application to him.

And it is not this or that means, not this or that assistance, but it is Jehovah himself that he expects and waits for. It is Jehovah himself that must satisfy the soul,—his favour and loving-kindness, and what flows from them; if he come not himself, if he give not himself, nothing else will relieve.

3. "My soul doth wait," or expect;—"It is no outward duty that I am at, no lip-labour, no bodily work, no formal, cold, careless performance of a duty. No; 'my soul doth wait.' It is soul-work, heart-work I am at. I wait, I wait with my whole soul."

4. "In his word do I hope," or "wait." There is not any thing of difficulty in these words. The word used, הוֹחָלְתִּי, is from יָחַל, "sunt qui, quod affine sit verbo 'חָלַל,' velint anxietatem et nisum includere, ut significet anxiè, seu enixè expectare, sustinere, et sperare;"—It signifies to hope, expect, endure, and sustain with care, solicitousness, and endeavours. Hence the LXX. have rendered the word by *ὑπέμεινεν*, and the Vulgar Latin "sustinui;"—"I have sustained and waited with patience."

And this on the word; or, he sustained his soul with the word of promise that it should not utterly faint, seeing he had made a discovery of grace and forgiveness, though yet at a great distance; he had a sight of land, though he was yet in a storm at sea; and therefore encourageth himself, or his soul, that it doth not despond.

But yet all this that we have spoken reaches not the intenseness of the soul of the psalmist, in this his expectation of Jehovah. The

Digitized by Google

earnest engagement of his soul in this duty riseth up above what he can express. Therefore he proceeds, verse 6: "My soul," saith he, "for the Lord" (that is, expects him, looks for him, waits for him, waits for his coming to me in love and with forgiveness), "more than the watchers for the morning, the watchers for the morning."

These latter words are variously rendered, and variously expounded. The LXX. and Vulgar Latin render them, "From the morning watch until night;" others, "From those that keep the morning watch, unto those that keep the evening watch;" "More than the watchers in the morning, more than the watchers in the morning."

The words also are variously expounded. Austin would have it to signify the placing of our hopes on the morning of Christ's resurrection, and continuing in them until the night of our own death.

Jerome, who renders the words, "From the morning watch to the morning watch," expounds them of continuing our hopes and expectations from the morning that we are called into the Lord's vineyard to the morning when we shall receive our reward; as much to the sense of the place as the former. And so Chrysostom interprets it of our whole life.

It cannot be denied but that they were led into these mistakes by the translation of the LXX. and that of the Vulgar Latin, who both of them have divided these words quite contrary to their proper dependence, and read them thus, "My soul expected the Lord. From the morning watch to the night watch, let Israel trust in the Lord;" so making the words to belong to the following exhortation unto others, which are plainly a part of the expression of his own duty.

The words, then, are a comparison, and an allusion unto watchmen, and may be taken in one of these two senses:—

1. In *things civil*, As those who keep the watch of the night do look, and long for, and expect the morning, when, being dismissed from their guard, they may take that sleep that they need and desire; which expresses a very earnest expectation, inquiry, and desire. Or,

2. In *things sacred*, with the Chaldee paraphrast, which renders the words, "More than they that look for the morning watch," which they carefully observe, that they may offer the morning sacrifice. In this sense, "As," saith he, "the warders and watchers in the temple do look diligently after the appearance of the morning, that they may with joy offer the morning sacrifice in the appointed season; so, and with more diligence, doth my soul wait for Jehovah."

You see the reading of the words, and how far the sense of them opens itself unto us by that consideration.

Digitized by Google

Let us, then, next see briefly the several parts of them, as they stand in relation one to another. We have, then,—

1. The *expression of the duty* wherein he was exercised; and that is, earnest waiting for Jehovah.

2. The *bottom and foundation* of that his waiting and expectation; that is, the word of God, the word of promise,—he diligently hoped in the word.

3. The *frame of his spirit in*, and the manner of his performance of, this duty; expressed,—(1.) In the words themselves that he uses, according as we opened them before. (2.) In the emphatical reduplication, yea, triplication of his expression of it: "I wait for the LORD;" "My soul waiteth for God;" "My soul waiteth for the Lord." (3.) In the comparison instituted between his discharge of his duty and others' performances of a corporal watch,—with the greatest care and diligence: "More than they that watch for the morning." So that we have,—

1. The duty he performed,—earnest waiting and expectation.

2. The object of his waiting,—Jehovah himself.

3. His supportment in that duty,—the word of promise.

4. The manner of his performance of it:—(1.) With earnestness and diligence. (2.) With perseverance.

Let us, then, now consider the words as they contain the frame and working of a sin-entangled soul.

Having been raised out of his depths by the discovery of forgiveness in God, as was before declared, yet not being immediately made partaker of that forgiveness, as to a comforting sense of it, he gathers up his soul from wandering from God, and supports it from sinking under his present condition.

"It is," saith he, "Jehovah alone, with whom is forgiveness, that can relieve and do me good. His favour, his loving-kindness, his communication of mercy and grace from thence, is that which I stand in need of. On him, therefore, do I with all heedfulness attend; on him do I wait. My soul is filled with expectation from him. Surely he will come to me, he will come and refresh me. Though he seem as yet to be afar off, and to leave me in these depths, yet I have his word of promise to support and stay my soul; on which I will lean until I obtain the enjoyment of him, and his kindness which is better than life."

And this is the frame of a sin-entangled soul who hath really by faith discovered forgiveness in God, but is not yet made partaker of a comforting, refreshing sense of it. And we may represent it in the ensuing observations:—

Obs. 1. The first *proper fruit* of faith's discovery of forgiveness in God, unto a sin-distressed soul, is waiting in patience and expectation.

Obs. 2. The *proper object* of a sin-distressed soul's waiting and

Digitized by Google

expecting is God himself, as reconciled in Christ: "I have waited for Jehovah."

Obs. 3. The *word of promise* is the soul's great supportment in waiting for God: "In thy word do I hope."

Obs. 4. Sin-distressed souls wait for God *with earnest intension of mind*, diligence, and expectation,—from the redoubling of the expression.

Obs. 5. *Continuance in waiting* until God appears to the soul *is necessary and prevailing;—necessary*, as that without which we cannot attain assistance; and *prevailing*, as that wherein we shall never fail.

Obs. 6. *Establishment in waiting*, when there is no present sense of forgiveness, yet gives the soul *much secret rest and comfort*. This observation ariseth from the influence that these verses have unto those that follow. The psalmist, having attained thus far, can now look about him and begin to deal with others, and exhort them to an expectation of grace and mercy.

And thus, though the soul be not absolutely in the haven of consolation where it would be, yet it hath cast out an anchor that gives it establishment and security. Though it be yet tossed, yet it is secured from shipwreck, and is rather sick than in danger. A waiting condition is a condition of safety.

Hence it is that he now turns himself to others; and upon the experience of the discovery that he had made of forgiveness in God, and the establishment and consolation he found in waiting on him, he calls upon and encourageth others to the same duty, verses 7, 8.

The propositions laid down I shall briefly pass through, still with respect unto the state and condition of the soul represented in the psalm. Many things that might justly be insisted on in the improvement of these truths have been anticipated in our former general rules. To them we must therefore sometimes have recourse, because they must not be again repeated. On this account, I say, we shall pass through them with all briefness possible; yet so as not wholly to omit any directions that are here tendered unto us as to the guidance of the soul, whose condition, and the working of whose faith, is here described. This, therefore, in the first place is proposed:—

The first proper fruit of faith's discovery of forgiveness in God, unto a sin-distressed soul, is waiting in patience and expectation.

This the psalmist openly and directly applies himself unto, and expresseth to have been as his duty, so his practice. And he doth it so emphatically, as was manifested in the opening of the words, that I know not that any duty is anywhere in the Scripture so recommended and lively represented unto us.

You must, therefore, for the right understanding of it, call to mind

Digitized by Google

what hath been spoken concerning the state of the soul inquired into,—its depths, entanglements, and sense of sin, with its application unto God about those things; as also remember what hath been delivered about the nature of forgiveness, with the revelation that is made of it unto the faith of believers, and that this may be done where the soul hath no refreshing sense of its own interest therein. It knows not that its own sins are forgiven, although it believes that there is forgiveness with God. Now, the principal duty that is incumbent on such a soul is that laid down in the proposition,—namely, patient waiting and expectation.

Two things must be done in reference hereunto:—First, The *nature of the duty* itself is to be declared; and, secondly, The *necessity and usefulness of its practice* is to be evinced and demonstrated.

For the nature of it, something hath been intimated giving light into it, in the opening of the words here used by the psalmist to express it by. But we may observe, that these duties, as required of us, do not consist in any particular acting of the soul, but in the whole spiritual frame and deportment of it, in reference unto the end aimed at in and by them. And this waiting, as here and elsewhere commended unto us, and which is comprehensive of the especial duties of the soul, in the case insisted on and described, comprehends these three things:—1. *Quietness*, in opposition to haste and tumultuating of spirit. 2. *Diligence*, in opposition to spiritual sloth, despondency, and neglect of means. 3. *Expectation*, in opposition to despair, distrust, and other proper immediate actings of unbelief.

1. *Quietness.* Hence this waiting itself is sometimes expressed by *silence.* To wait is to be silent: Lam. iii. 26, "It is good both to hope וְדוּמָם, and to be silent for the salvation of the LORD;" that is, to "wait quietly," as we have rendered the word. And the same word we render sometimes "to rest:" as Ps. xxxvii. 7, "Rest on the LORD, דּוֹם לַיהוָה, be silent unto him," where it is joined with hoping or waiting, as that which belongs unto the nature of it; and so in sundry other places. And this God, in an especial manner, calleth souls unto in straits and distresses. "In quietness and confidence," saith he, "shall be your strength," Isa. xxx. 15. And the effect of the righteousness of God by Christ is said to be "quietness and assurance for ever," Isa. xxxii. 17;—first quietness, and then assurance. Now, this silence and quietness which accompanieth waiting, yea, which is an essential part of it, is opposed, *first*, to *haste;* and haste is the soul's undue lifting up itself, proceeding from a weariness of its condition, to press after an end of its troubles not according to the conduct of the Spirit of God. Thus, when God calleth his people to waiting, he expresseth the contrary acting unto this duty by the lifting up of the soul: Hab. ii. 3, 4, "Though the vision tarry, wait for

Digitized by Google

it. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith." God hath given unto the soul a vision of peace, through the discovery of that forgiveness which is with him; but he will have us wait for an actual participation of it unto rest and comfort. He that will not do so, but lifts up his soul,—that is, in making haste beyond the rule and method of the Spirit of God in this matter,—his heart is not upright in him, nor will he know what it is to live by faith. This ruins and disappoints many a soul in its attempts for forgiveness. The prophet, speaking of this matter, tells us that "he that believeth shall not," nor will not, "make haste," Isa. xxviii. 16;—which words the apostle twice making use of, Rom. ix. 33, x. 11, in both places renders them, "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed," or confounded; and that because this haste turns men off from believing, and so disappoints their hopes, and leaves them unto shame and confusion. Men with a sense of the guilt of sin, having some discovery made to them of the rest, ease, and peace which they may obtain to their souls by forgiveness, are ready to catch greedily at it, and to make false, unsound, undue applications of it unto themselves. They cannot bear the yoke that the Lord hath put upon them, but grow impatient under it, and cry with Rachel, "Give me children, or else I die." Any way they would obtain it. Now, as the first duty of such a soul is to apply itself unto waiting, so the first entrance into waiting consists in this silence and quietness of heart and spirit. This is the soul's endeavour to keep itself humble, satisfied with the sovereign pleasure of God in its condition, and refusing all ways and means of rest and peace but what it is guided and directed unto by the word and Spirit. *Secondly*, As it is opposed unto haste, so it is unto *tumultuating thoughts* and vexatious disquietments. The soul is silent. Ps. xxxix. 9, "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." He redoubles the expression, whereby he sets out his endeavour to quiet and still his soul in the will of God. In the condition discoursed of, the soul is apt to have many tumultuating thoughts, or a multitude of perplexing thoughts, of no use or advantage unto it. How they are to be watched against and rejected was before declared in our general rules. This quietness in waiting will prevent them. And this is the first thing in the duty prescribed.

2. *Diligence*, in opposition unto spiritual sloth, is included in it also. Diligence is the activity of the mind, in the regular use of means, for the pursuit of any end proposed. The end aimed at by the soul is a comforting, refreshing interest in that forgiveness that is with God. For the attaining thereof, there are sundry means instituted and blessed of God. A neglect of them, through regardlessness or sloth, will certainly disappoint the soul from attaining that end.

Digitized by Google

It is confessedly so in things natural. He that soweth not must not think to reap; he that clotheth not himself will not be warm; nor he enjoy health who neglects the means of it. Men understand this as to their outward concerns; and although they have a due respect unto the blessing of God, yet they expect not to be rich without industry in their ways. It is so also in things spiritual. God hath appointed one thing to be the means of obtaining another; in the use of them doth he bless us, and from the use of them doth his glory arise, because they are his own appointments. And this diligence wholly respecteth practice, or the regular use of means. A man is said to be diligent in business, to have a diligent hand; though it be an affection of the mind, yet it simply respects practice and operation. This diligence in his waiting David expresseth, Ps. xl. 1, קִוֹּיתִי קִוֹּיתִי. We render it, "I have waited patiently," that is, "Waiting I have waited;" that is, diligently, earnestly, in the use of means. So he describes this duty by an elegant similitude, Ps. cxxiii. 2, "Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the LORD our God, until that he have mercy upon us." Servants that wait on their masters and look to their hands, it is to expect an intimation of their minds as to what they would have them do, that they may address themselves unto it. "So," saith he, "do we wait for mercy;"—not in a slothful neglect of duties, but in a constant readiness to observe the will of God in all his commands. An instance hereof we have in the spouse when she was in the condition here described, Cant. iii. 1, 2. She wanted the presence of her Beloved; which amounts to the same state which we have under consideration; for where the presence of Christ is not, there can be no sense of forgiveness. At first she seeks him upon her bed: "By night upon my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not." She seems herein to have gone no farther than desires, for she was in her bed, where she could do no more; and the issue is, she found him not. But doth she so satisfy herself, and lie still, waiting until he should come there unto her? No; she says, "I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth." She resolves to put herself into the use of all means whereby one may be sought that is wanting. In the city, streets, and fields, she would inquire after him. And the blessed success she had herein is reported, verse 4; she "found him, she held him, she would not let him go." This, then, belongs unto the waiting of the soul: diligence in the use of means, whereby God is pleased ordinarily to communicate a sense of pardon and forgiveness, is a principal part of it. What these means are is known. Prayer, meditation, reading, hearing of the word, dispensa-

Digitized by Google

tion of the sacraments, they are all appointed to this purpose; they are all means of communicating love and grace to the soul. Be not, then, heartless or slothful: up and be doing; attend with diligence to the word of grace; be fervent in prayer, assiduous in the use of all ordinances of the church; in one or other of them, at one time or other, thou wilt meet with Him whom thy soul loveth, and God through Him will speak peace unto thee.

3. There is *expectation* in it, which lies in a direct opposition to all the actings of unbelief in this matter, and is the very life and soul of the duty under consideration. So the psalmist declares it, Ps. lxii. 5, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is only from him." The soul will not, cannot, in a due manner wait upon God, unless it has expectations from him,—unless, as James speaks, he looks to receive somewhat from him, chap. i. 7. The soul in this condition regards forgiveness not only as by itself it is desired, but principally as it is by God promised. Thence they expect it. This is expressed in the fourth proposition before laid down,—namely, that sin-distressed souls wait for God with earnestness, intension of mind, and expectation. As this ariseth from the redoubling of the expression, so principally from the nature of the comparison that he makes on himself in his waiting with them that watch for the morning. Those that watch for the morning do not only desire it and prepare for it, but they expect it, and know assuredly that it will come. Though darkness may for a time be troublesome, and continue longer than they would desire, yet they know that the morning hath its appointed time of return, beyond which it will not tarry; and, therefore, they look out for its appearance on all occasions. So it is with the soul in this matter. So says David, Ps. v. 3, "I will direct my prayer unto thee וְאֶצְפֶּה, and look up:" so we. The words before are defective: בֹּקֶר אֶעֱרָךְ לָךְ, "In the morning," or rather every morning, "I will order unto thee." We restrain this unto prayer: "I will direct my prayer unto thee." But this was expressed directly in the words foregoing: "In the morning thou shalt hear my voice;" that is, "the voice of my prayer and supplications," as it is often supplied. And although the psalmist doth sometimes repeat the same thing in different expressions, yet here he seemeth not so to do, but rather proceeds to declare the general frame of his spirit in walking with God. "I will," saith he, "order all things towards God, so as that I may wait upon him in the ways of his appointment, וְאֶצְפֶּה, and will look up." It seems in our translation to express his posture in his prayer; but the word is of another importance. It is diligently to look out after that which is coming towards us, and looking out after the accomplishment of our expectation. This is a part of our waiting for God; yea, as was said, the

Digitized by Google

life of it, that which is principally intended in it. The prophet calls it his "standing upon his watch tower, and watching to see what God would speak unto him," Hab. ii. 3,—namely, in answer unto that prayer which he put up in his trouble. He is now waiting in expectation of an answer from God. And this is that which poor, weak, trembling sinners are so encouraged unto, Isa. xxxv. 3, 4, "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come." Weakness and discouragements are the effects of unbelief. These he would have removed, with an expectation of the coming of God unto the soul, according to the promise. And this, I say, belongs unto the waiting of the soul in the condition described. Such a one doth expect and hope that God will in his season manifest himself and his love unto him, and give him an experimental sense of a blessed interest in forgiveness. And the accomplishment of this purpose and promise of God, it looks out after continually. It will not despond and be heartless, but stir up and strengthen itself unto a full expectation to have the desires of his soul satisfied in due time: as we find David doing in places almost innumerable.

This is the duty that, in the first place, is recommended unto the soul who is persuaded that there is forgiveness with God, but sees not his own interest therein:—Wait on, or for, the Lord. And it hath two properties when it is performed in a due manner,—namely, patience and perseverance. By the one men are kept to the length of God's time; by the other they are preserved in a due length of their own duty.

And this is that which was laid down in the first proposition drawn from the words,—namely, that continuance in watching, until God appears unto the soul, is *necessary*, as that without which we cannot attain what we look after; and *prevailing*, as that wherein we shall never fail.

God is not to be limited, nor his times prescribed unto him. We know our way and the end of our journey; but our stations of especial rest we must wait for at his mouth, as the people did in the wilderness. When David comes to deal with God in his great distress, he says unto him, "O LORD, thou art my God; my times are in thy hand," Ps. xxxi. 14, 15. His times of trouble and of peace, of darkness and of light, he acknowledged to be in the hand and at the disposal of God, so that it was his duty to wait his time and season for his share and portion in them.

During this state the soul meets with many oppositions, difficulties, and perplexities, especially if its darkness be of long continuance; as with some it abides many years, with some all the days of their

Digitized by Google

lives. Their hope being hereby deferred makes their heart sick, and their spirit oftentimes to faint; and this fainting is a defect in waiting, for want of perseverance and continuance, which frustrates the end of it. So David, Ps. xxvii. 13, "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD;"—"Had I not received supportment by faith, I had fainted." And wherein doth that consist? what was the fainting which he had been overtaken withal, without the supportment mentioned? It was a relinquishment of waiting on God, as he manifests by the exhortation which he gives to himself and others, verse 14, "Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD;"—"Wait with courage and resolution, that thou faint not." And the apostle puts the blessed event of faith and obedience upon the avoidance of this evil: Gal. vi. 9, "We shall reap, if we faint not." Hence we have both encouragements given against it, and promises that in the way of God we shall not be overtaken with it. "Consider the Lord Christ," saith the apostle, "the captain of your salvation, 'lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds,'" Heb. xii. 3. Nothing else can cause you to come short of the mark aimed at. "They," saith the prophet, "that wait upon the LORD,"—that is, in the use of the means by him appointed,—"shall not faint," Isa. xl. 31.

This *continuance, then, in waiting* is to accompany this duty, upon the account of both the things mentioned in the proposition,—that it is indispensably necessary on our own account, and it is assuredly prevailing in the end; it will not fail.

1. It is *necessary.* They that watch for the morning, to whose frame and actings the waiting of the soul for God is compared, give not over until the light doth appear; or if they do, if they are wearied and faint, and so cease watching, all their former pains will be lost, and they will lie down in disappointments. So will it be with the soul that deserts its watch, and faints in its waiting. If upon the eruption of new lusts or corruptions,—if upon the return of old temptations, or the assaults of new ones,—if upon a revived perplexing sense of guilt, or on the tediousness of working and labouring so much and so long in the dark,—the soul begin to say in itself, "I have looked for light and behold darkness, for peace and yet trouble cometh; the summer is past, the harvest is ended, and I am not relieved; such and such blessed means have been enjoyed, and yet I have not attained rest;" and so give over its waiting in the way and course before prescribed;—it will at length utterly fail, and come short of the grace aimed at. "Thou hast laboured, and hast not fainted," brings in the reward, Rev. ii. 3.

2. Perseverance in waiting is assuredly *prevalent;* and this renders it a necessary part of the duty itself. If we continue to wait for

Digitized by Google

the vision of peace it will come, it will not tarry, but answer our expectation of it. Never soul miscarried that abode in this duty unto the end. The joys of heaven may sometimes prevent consolations in this life; God sometimes gives in the full harvest without sending of the first-fruits aforehand;—but spiritual or eternal peace and rest is the infallible end of permanent waiting for God.

This is the duty that the psalmist declares himself to be engaged in, upon the encouraging discovery which was made unto him of forgiveness in God: "There is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope." And this is that which, in the like condition, is required of us. This is the great direction which was given us, in the example and practice of the psalmist, as to our duty and deportment in the condition described. This was the way whereby he rose out of his depths and escaped out of his entanglements. Is this, then, the state of any of us? Let such take directions from hence.

1. *Encourage your souls unto waiting on God.* Do new fears arise, do old disconsolations continue? Say unto your souls, "Yet wait on God. 'Why are you cast down, O our souls? and why are you disquieted within us? hope in God; for we shall yet praise him, who is the health of our countenance, and our God;'" as the psalmist doth in the like case, Ps. xliii. 5. So he speaks elsewhere, "Wait on God, and be of good courage;"—"Shake off sloth, rouse up yourselves from under despondencies; let not fears prevail." This is the only way for success, and it will assuredly be prevalent. Oppose this resolution to every discouragement, and it will give new life to faith and hope. Say, "My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the rock of my heart, and my portion for ever;" as Ps. lxxiii. 26. Though thy perplexed thoughts have even wearied and worn out the outward man, as in many they do, so that flesh faileth,—and though thou hast no refreshing evidence from within, from thyself, or thy own experience, so that thy heart faileth,—yet resolve to look unto God; there is strength in him, and satisfaction in him, for the whole man; he is a rock, and a portion. This will strengthen things which otherwise will be ready to die. This will keep life in thy course, and stir thee up to plead it with God in an acceptable season, when he will be found. Job carried up his condition unto a supposition that God might slay him,—that is, add one stroke, one rebuke unto another, until he was consumed, and so take him out of the world in darkness and in sorrow,—yet he resolved to trust, to hope, to wait on him, as knowing that he should not utterly miscarry so doing. This frame the church expresseth so admirably that nothing can be added thereunto: Lam. iii. 17–26, "Thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgat prosperity. And I said, My strength and my hope is perished

Digitized by Google

from the LORD: remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD." We have here both the condition and the duty insisted on, with the method of the soul's actings in reference unto the one and the other fully expressed. The condition is sad and bitter; the soul is in depths, far from peace and rest, verse 17. In this state it is ready utterly to faint, and to give up all for lost and gone, both strength for the present and hopes for the future, verse 18. This makes its condition full of sorrow and bitterness, and its own thoughts become unto it like "wormwood and gall," verses 19, 20. But doth he lie down under the burden of all this trouble? doth he despond and give over? No; saith he, "I call to mind that 'there is forgiveness with God;' grace, mercy, goodness for the relief of distressed souls, such as are in my condition," verses 21–23. Thence the conclusion is, that as all help is to be looked for, all relief expected from him alone, so "it is good that a man should quietly wait and hope for the salvation of God," verses 24–26. This he stirs up himself unto as the best, as the most blessed course for his deliverance.

2. Remember that *diligent use of the means for the end aimed at* is a necessary concomitant of, and ingredient unto, waiting on God. Take in the consideration of this direction also. Do not think to be freed from your entanglements by restless, heartless desiring that it were otherwise with you. Means are to be used that relief may be obtained. What those means are is known unto all. Mortification of sin, prayer, meditation, due attendance upon all gospel ordinances; conferring in general about spiritual things, advising in particular about our own state and condition, with such who, having received the tongue of the learned, are able to speak a word in season to them that are weary,—are required to this purpose. And in all these are diligence and perseverance to be exercised, or in vain shall men desire a delivery from their entanglements.

God the proper object of the soul's waiting in its distresses and depths.

WE have seen what the duty is intended in the proposition. We are nextly to consider the reason also of it, why this is the great, first,

Digitized by Google

and principal duty of souls who in their depths have it discovered unto them that there is forgiveness with God; and the reason hereof is that which is expressed in our second observation before mentioned, namely,—

That the *proper object of a sin-distressed soul's waiting and expectation is God himself as revealed in Christ.* "I have," saith the psalmist, "waited for Jehovah;"—"It is not this or that mercy or grace, this or that help or relief, but it is Jehovah himself that I wait for."

Here, then, we must do two things,—first, Show in what sense *God himself is the object of the waiting of the soul;* secondly, How it appears from hence that *waiting is so necessary a duty.*

First, *It is the Lord himself, Jehovah himself, that the soul waiteth for.* It is not grace, mercy, or relief absolutely considered, but the God of all grace and help, that is the full adequate object of the soul's waiting and expectation; only, herein he is not considered absolutely in his own nature, but as there is forgiveness with him. What is required hereunto hath been at large before declared. It is as he is revealed in and by Jesus Christ; as in him he hath found a ransom, and accepted the atonement for sinners in his blood;—as he is a God in covenant, so he is himself the object of our waiting.

And that, first, because all troubles, depths, entanglements arise from,—1. The *absence of God from the soul;* and, 2. *From his displeasure.*

1. The *absence of God from the soul,* by his departure, withdrawing, or hiding himself from it, is that which principally casts the soul into its depths. "Woe unto them," saith the Lord, "when I depart from them!" Hos. ix. 12. And this woe, this sorrow, doth not attend only a universal, a total departure of God from any; but that also which is gradual or partial, in some things, in some seasons. When God withdraws his enlightening, his refreshing, his comforting presence, as to any ways or means whereby he hath formerly communicated himself unto the souls of any, then "woe unto them!" sorrows will befall them, and they will fall into depths and entanglements. Now, this condition calls for waiting. If God be withdrawn, if he hide himself, what hath the soul to do but to wait for his return? So saith the prophet Isaiah, chap. viii. 17, "I will wait upon the LORD, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him." If God hide himself, this is the natural and proper duty of the soul, to wait and to look for him. Other course of relief it cannot apply itself unto. What that waiting is, and wherein it doth consist, hath been declared. Patient seeking of God in the ways of his appointment is comprised in it. This the prophet expresseth in that word, "I will look for him;" indeed, the same in the original with that in

Digitized by Google

the psalm, וְקִוִּיתִי לוֹ;—"And I will earnestly look out after him, with expectation of his return unto me."

2. A *sense of God's displeasure* is another cause of these depths and troubles, and of the continuance of the soul in them, notwithstanding it hath made a blessed discovery by faith that there is with him forgiveness. This hath been so fully manifested through the whole preceding discourse, that it need not again be insisted on. All hath respect unto sin; and the reason of the trouble that ariseth from sin is because of the displeasure of God against it. What, then, is the natural posture and frame of the soul towards God as displeased? Shall he contend with him? shall he harden himself against him? shall he despise his wrath and anger, and contemn his threatenings? or shall he hide himself from him, and so avoid the effects of his wrath? Who knows not how ruinous and pernicious to the soul such courses would be? and how many are ruined by them every day? Patient waiting is the soul's only reserve on this account also. And,—

Secondly, This duty in the occasion mentioned is necessary upon the account of the greatness and sovereignty of him with whom we have to do: "My soul waiteth for Jehovah." Indeed, waiting is a duty that depends on the distance that is between the persons concerned in it,—namely, he that waiteth, and he that is waited on; so the psalmist informs us, Ps. cxxiii. 2. It is an action like that of servants and handmaids towards their masters or rulers. And the greater this distance is, the more cogent are the reasons of this duty on all occasions. And because we are practically averse from the due performance of this duty, or at least quickly grow weary of it, notwithstanding our full conviction of its necessity, I shall a little insist on some such considerations of God and ourselves, as may not only evince the necessity of this duty, but also satisfy us of its reasonableness; that by the first we may be engaged into it, and by the latter preserved in it.

Two things we may to this purpose consider in God, in Jehovah, whom we are to wait for:—*First*, His being, and the absolute and essential properties of his nature; *secondly*, Those attributes of his nature which respect his dealing with us;—both which are suited to beget in us affections and a frame of spirit compliant with the duty proposed.

Considerations of God, rendering our waiting on him reasonable and necessary—His glorious being.

First, LET us consider the *infinite glorious being* of Jehovah, with his absolute, incommunicable, essential excellencies; and then

Digitized by Google

try whether it doth not become us in every condition to wait for him, and especially in that under consideration. This course God himself took with Job to recover him from his discontents and complaints, to reduce him to quietness and waiting. He sets before him his own glorious greatness, as manifested in the works of his power, that thereby, being convinced of his own ignorance, weakness, and infinite distance in all things from him, he might humble his soul into the most submissive dependence on him and waiting for him. And this he doth accordingly, chap. xlii. 6: "I abhor myself," saith he, "and repent in dust and ashes." His soul now comes to be willing to be at God's disposal; and therein he found present rest and a speedy healing of his condition. It is "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy," Isa. lvii. 15, with whom we have now to do: "He sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants of it are as grasshoppers before him; yea, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted unto him less than nothing, and vanity," Isa. xl. 15, 17, 22. To what end doth the Lord set forth and declare his glorious greatness and power? It is that all might be brought to trust in him and to wait for him, as at large is declared in the close of the chapter; for shall "grasshoppers," a "drop of the bucket," "dust of the balance," things "less than nothing," repine against, or wax weary of, the will of the immense, glorious, and lofty One? He that "taketh up the isles as a very little thing," may surely, if he please, destroy, cast, and forsake one isle, one city in an isle, one person in a city; and we are before him but single persons. Serious thoughts of this infinite, all-glorious Being will either quiet our souls or overwhelm them. All our weariness of his dispensations towards us arises from secret imaginations that he is such a one as ourselves,—one that is to do nothing but what seems good in our eyes. But if we cannot comprehend his being, we cannot make rules to judge of his ways and proceedings. And how small a portion is it that we know of God! The nearest approaches of our reasons and imaginations leave us still at an infinite distance from him. And, indeed, what we speak of his greatness, we know not well what it signifies; we only declare our respect unto that which we believe, admire, and adore, but are not able to comprehend. All our thoughts come as short of his excellent greatness as our natures do of his,—that is, infinitely. Behold the universe, the glorious fabric of heaven and earth; how little is it that we know of its beauty, order, and disposal!—yet was it all the product of the word of his mouth; and with the same facility can he, when he pleaseth, reduce it to its primitive nothing. And what are we, poor worms of

Digitized by Google

the earth, an inconsiderable, unknown part of the lower series and order of the works of his hands, few in number, fading in condition, unregarded unto the residue of our fellow-creatures, that we should subduct ourselves from under any kind of his dealings with us, or be weary of waiting for his pleasure? This he presseth on us, Ps. xlvi. 10, "Be still, and know that I am God;"—"Let there be no more repinings, no more disputings; continue waiting in silence and patience. Consider who I am. 'Be still, and know that I am God.'"

Farther to help us in this consideration, let us a little also fix our minds towards some of the glorious, essential, incommunicable properties of his nature distinctly; as,—

1. His *eternity*. This Moses proposeth, to bring the souls of believers to submission, trust, and waiting: Ps. xc. 1, "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God;"—"One that hath his being and subsistence not in a duration of time, but in eternity itself." So doth Habakkuk also, chap. i. 12, "Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One?" and hence he draws his conclusion against making haste in any condition, and for tarrying and waiting for God. The like consideration is managed by David also, Ps. cii. 27. How inconceivable is this glorious divine property unto the thoughts and minds of men! How weak are the ways and terms whereby they go about to express it! One says, it is a "nunc stans;" another, that it is a "perpetual duration." He that says most, only signifies what he knows of what it is not. We are of yesterday, change every moment, and are leaving our station to-morrow. God is still the same, was so before the world was,—from eternity. And now I cannot think what I have said, but only have intimated what I adore. The whole duration of the world, from the beginning unto the end, takes up no space in this eternity of God: for how long soever it hath continued or may yet continue, it will all amount but to so many thousand years, so long a time; and time hath no place in eternity. And for us who have in this matter to do with God, what is our continuance unto that of the world? a moment, as it were, in comparison of the whole. When men's lives were of old prolonged beyond the date and continuance of empires or kingdoms now, yet this was the winding up of all,—such a one lived so many years, "and he died," Gen. v. And what are we, poor worms, whose lives are measured by inches, in comparison of their span? what are we before the eternal God, God always immutably subsisting in his own infinite being? A real consideration hereof will subdue the soul into a condition of dependence on him and of waiting for him.

2. *The immensity of his essence and his omnipresence* is of the same consideration: "Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the

Digitized by Google

LORD," Jer. xxiii. 24. "The heavens, even the heaven of heavens," the supreme and most comprehensive created being, "cannot contain him," saith Solomon. In his infinitely glorious being he is present with, and indistant from all places, things, times, all the works of his hands; and is no less gloriously subsisting where they are not. God is where heaven and earth are not, no less than where they are; and where they are not is himself. Where there is no place, no space, real or imaginary, God is; for place and imagination have nothing to do with immensity. And he is present everywhere in creation,—where I am writing, where you are reading; he is present with you, indistant from you. The thoughts of men's hearts for the most part are, that God as to his essence is in *heaven* only; and it is well if some think he is there, seeing they live and act as if there were neither God nor devil but themselves. But on these apprehensions such thoughts are ready secretly to arise, and effectually to prevail, as are expressed Job xxii. 13, 14, "How doth God know? can he judge through the dark? Thick clouds are a covering unto him, that he seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of heaven." Apprehensions of God's distance from men harden them in their ways. But it is utterly otherwise. God is everywhere, and a man may on all occasions say with Jacob, "God is in this place, and I knew it not." Let the soul, then, who is thus called to wait on God, exercise itself with thoughts about this immensity of his nature and being. Comprehend it, fully understand it, we can never; but the consideration of it will give that awe of his greatness upon our hearts, as that we shall learn to tremble before him, and to be willing to wait for him in all things.

3. Thoughts of *the holiness of God*, or infinite self-purity of this eternal, immense Being, are singularly useful to the same purpose. This is that which Eliphaz affirms that he received by vision to reply to the complaint and impatience of Job, chap. iv. 17–21. After he hath declared his vision, with the manner of it, this he affirms to be the revelation that by voice was made unto him: "Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his Maker? Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly. How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before the moth?" If the saints and angels in heaven do not answer this infinite holiness of God in their most perfect condition, is it meet for worms of the earth to suppose that any thing which proceeds from him is not absolutely holy and perfect, and so best for them? This is the fiery property of the nature of God, whence he is called a "consuming fire" and "everlasting burnings." And the law, whereon he had impressed some representation of it, is called a "fiery law," as that which will consume and burn up whatever

Digitized by Google

is perverse and evil. Hence the prophet who had a representation of the glory of God in a vision, and heard the seraphim proclaiming his holiness, cried out, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips," Isa. vi. 5. He thought it impossible that he should bear that near approach of the holiness of God. And with the remembrance hereof doth Joshua still the people,—with the terror of the Lord, chap. xiv. 19. Let such souls, then, as are under troubles and perplexities on any account, endeavour to exercise their thoughts about this infinite purity and fiery holiness of God. They will quickly find it their wisdom to become as weaned children before him, and content themselves with what he shall guide them unto; which is to wait for him. This fiery holiness streams from his throne, Dan. vii. 10, and would quickly consume the whole creation, as now under the curse and sin, were it not for the interposing of Jesus Christ.

4. His *glorious majesty* as the Ruler of all the world. Majesty relates unto government, and it calls us to such an awe of him as doth render our waiting for him comely and necessary. God's throne is said to be in heaven, and there principally do the glorious beams of his terrible majesty shine forth; but he hath also made some representation of it on the earth, that we might learn to fear before him. Such was the appearance that he gave of his glory in the giving of the law, whereby he will judge the world, and condemn the transgressors of it who obtain not an acquitment in the blood of Jesus Christ. See the description of it in Exod. xix. 16–18. "So terrible was the sight" hereof, "that Moses" himself "said, I exceedingly fear and quake," Heb. xii. 21. And what effect it had upon all the people is declared, Exod. xx. 18, 19. They were not able to bear it, although they had good assurance that it was for their benefit and advantage that he so drew nigh and manifested his glory unto them. Are we not satisfied with our condition? cannot we wait under his present dispensations? Let us think how we may approach unto his presence, or stand before his glorious majesty. Will not the dread of his excellency fall upon us? will not his terror make us afraid? shall we not think his way best, and his time best, and that our duty is to be silent before him? And the like manifestation hath he made of his glory, as the great Judge of all upon the throne, unto sundry of the prophets: as unto Isaiah, chap. vi. 1–4; to Ezekiel, chap. i.; to Daniel, chap. vii. 9, 10; to John, Rev. i. Read the places attentively, and learn to tremble before him. These are not things that are foreign unto us. This God is our God. The same throne of his greatness and majesty is still established in the heavens. Let us, then, in all our hastes and heats that our spirits in any condition are prone unto, present ourselves before this throne of God, and then consider

Digitized by Google

what will be best for us to say or do; what frame of heart and spirit will become us, and be safest for us. All this glory doth encompass us every moment, although we perceive it not. And it will be but a few days before all the vails and shades that are about us shall be taken away and depart; and then shall all this glory appear unto us unto endless bliss or everlasting woe. Let us therefore know, that nothing, in our dealings with him, doth better become us than silently to wait for him, and what he will speak unto us in our depths and straits.

5. It is good to consider the instances that God hath given of this his *infinite greatness*, power, majesty, and glory. Such was his mighty work of creating all things out of nothing. We dwell on little mole-hills in the earth, and yet we know the least part of the excellency of that spot of ground which is given us for our habitation here below. But what is it unto the whole habitable world and the fulness thereof? And what an amazing thing is its greatness, with the wide and large sea, with all sorts of creatures therein! The least of these hath a beauty, a glory, an excellency, that the utmost of our inquiries end in admiration of. And all this is but the *earth*, the lower, depressed part of the world. What shall we say concerning the heavens over us, and all those creatures of light that have their habitations in them? Who can conceive the beauty, order, use, and course of them? The consideration hereof caused the psalmist to cry out, "LORD, our Lord, how excellent and glorious art thou!" Ps. viii. 1. And what is the rise, spring, and cause of these things? are they not all the effect of the word of the power of this glorious God? And doth he not in them, and by them, speak us into a reverence of his greatness? The like, also, may be said concerning his mighty and strange works of providence in the rule of the world. Is not this he who brought the flood of old upon the world of ungodly men? Is it not he who consumed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire from heaven, setting them forth as examples unto them that should afterward live ungodly, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire? Is it not he who destroyed Egypt with his plagues, and drowned Pharaoh with his host in the Red Sea? Is it not he, one of whose servants slew a hundred and fourscore and five thousand in Sennacherib's army in one night? that opened the earth to swallow up Dathan and Abiram? and sent out fire from the altar to devour Nadab and Abihu? And have not all ages been filled with such instances of his greatness and power?

The end why I have insisted on these things is, to show the reasonableness of the duty which we are pressing unto,—namely, to wait on God quietly and patiently in every condition of distress; for what else becomes us when we have to do with this great and holy One?

Digitized by Google

And a due consideration of these things will exceedingly influence our minds thereunto.

Secondly, This waiting for God respecteth the whole of the condition expressed in the psalm; and this containeth not only spiritual depths about sin, which we have at large insisted on, but also providential depths, depths of trouble or affliction, that we may be exercised withal in the holy, wise providence of God. In reference also unto these, waiting in patience and silence is our duty. And there are two considerations that will assist us in this duty, with respect unto such depths,—that is, of trouble or affliction. And the *first* of these is the consideration of those properties of God which he exerciseth in an especial manner in all his dealings with us, and which in all our troubles we are principally to regard. The *second* is the consideration of ourselves, what we are, and what we have deserved.

Let us begin with the former. And there are four things in God's dispensations towards us and dealing with us that in this matter we should consider, all suited to work in us the end aimed at:—

1. The first is his *sovereignty*. This he declares, this we are to acknowledge and submit unto, in all the great and dreadful dispensations of his providence, in all his dealings with our souls. May he not do what he will with his own? Who shall say unto him, What doest thou? or if they do so, what shall give them countenance in their so doing? He made all this world of nothing, and could have made another, more, or all things, quite otherwise than they are. It would not subsist one moment without his omnipotent supportment. Nothing would be continued in its place, course, use, without his effectual influence and countenance. If any thing can be, live, or act a moment without him, we may take free leave to dispute its disposal with him, and to haste unto the accomplishment of our desires. But from the angels in heaven to the worms of the earth and the grass of the field, all depend on him and his power continually. Why was this part of the creation an angel, that a worm; this a man, that a brute beast? Is it from their own choice, designing, or contrivance, or brought about by their own wisdom? or is it merely from the sovereign pleasure and will of God? And what a madness is it to repine against what he doth, seeing all things are as he makes them and disposeth them, nor can be otherwise! Even the repiner himself hath his being and subsistence upon his mere pleasure. This sovereignty of God Elihu pleads in his dealings with Job, chap. xxxiii. 8–13. He apprehended that Job had reasoned against God's severe dispensations towards him, and that he did not humble himself under his mighty hand wherewith he was exercised, nor wait for him in a due manner; and, therefore, what doth he propose unto him to bring him unto this duty? what doth

Digitized by Google

he reply unto his reasonings and complaints? "Behold," says he, verse 12, "in this thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man." Verse 13, "Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters;"—"Be it that in other things thou art just and innocent, that thou art free from the things wherewith thy friends have charged thee, yet in this matter thou art not just; it is neither just nor equal that any man should complain of or repine against any of God's dispensations." "Yea, but I suppose that these dealings of God are very grievous, very dreadful, such as he hath, it may be, scarce exercised towards any from the foundation of the world; to be utterly destroyed and consumed in a day, in all relations and enjoyments, and that at a time and season when no such thing was looked for or provided against; to have a sense of sin revived on the conscience, after pardon obtained, as it is with me." "All is one," saith he; "if thou complainest thou art not just." And what reason doth he give thereof? Why, "'God is greater than man;' infinitely so in power and sovereign glory. He is so absolutely therein that 'he giveth not account of any of his matters;' and what folly, what injustice is it, to complain of his proceedings! Consider his absolute dominion over the works of his hands, over thyself, and all that thou hast; his infinite distance from thee, and greatness above thee; and then see whether it be just or no to repine against what he doth." And he pursues the same consideration, chap. xxxiv. 18, 19: "If when kings and princes rule in righteousness, it is a contempt of their authority to say unto them they are wicked and ungodly, then wilt thou speak against him, contend with him, 'that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they are all the work of his hands.'" And, verse 29, "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only." All is one; whatever God doth, and towards whomsoever, be they many or few, a whole nation, or city, or one single person, be they high or low, rich or poor, good or bad, all are the works of his hands, and he may deal with them as seems good unto him. And this man alone, as God afterward declares, made use of the right and proper mediums to take off Job from complaining, and to compose his spirit to rest and peace, and to bring him to wait patiently for God. For whereas his other friends injuriously charged him with hypocrisy, and that he had in an especial manner, above other men, deserved those judgments of God which he was exercised withal; he, who was conscious unto his own integrity, was only provoked and exasperated by their arguings, and stirred up to plead his own innocency and uprightness. But this man, allowing him the plea of his integrity, calls him to the consideration of the

Digitized by Google

greatness and sovereignty of God, against which there is no rising up; and this God himself afterward calls him unto.

Deep and serious thoughts of God's sovereignty and absolute dominion or authority over all the works of his hands, are an effectual means to work the soul unto this duty; yea, this is that which we are to bring our souls to. Let us consider with whom we have to do. Are not we and all our concernments in his hands, as the clay in the hand of the potter? and may he not do what he will with his own? Shall we call him unto an account? is not what he doth good and holy because he doth it? Do any repining thoughts against the works of God arise in our hearts? are any complaints ready to break out of our mouths? let us lay our hands on our hearts, and our mouths in the dust, with thoughts of his greatness and absolute sovereignty, and it will work our whole souls into a better frame.

And this extends itself unto the manners, times, and seasons of all things whatever. As in earthly things, if God will bring a dreadful judgment of fire upon a people, a nation; ah! why must it be London? if on London, why so terrible, raging, and unconquerable? why the city, not the suburbs? why my house, not my neighbour's? why had such a one help, and I none? All these things are wholly to be referred to God's sovereign pleasure. There alone can the soul of man find rest and peace. It is so in spiritual dispensations also.

Thus Aaron, upon the sudden death of his two eldest sons, being minded by Moses of God's sovereignty and holiness, immediately "held his peace," or quietly humbled himself under his mighty hand, Lev. x. 3. And David, when things were brought into extreme confusion by the rebellion of Absalom, followed by the ungodly multitude of the whole nation, relinquisheth all other arguments and pleas, and lets go complaints in a resignation of himself and all his concernments unto the absolute pleasure of God, 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26. And this, in all our extremities, must we bring our souls unto before we can attain any rest or peace, or the least comfortable persuasion that we may not yet fall under greater severities, in the just indignation of God against us.

2. The *wisdom of God* is also to be considered and submitted unto: Job ix. 4, "He is wise in heart: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?" This the prophet joins with his greatness and sovereignty, Isa. xl. 12–14. "There is no searching of his understanding," verse 28. And the apostle winds up all his considerations of the works of God in a holy admiration of his knowledge and wisdom, whence his "judgment becomes unsearchable, and his ways past finding out," Rom. xi. 33, 34. He seeth and knoweth all things, in all their causes, effects, consequences, and circumstances, in their utmost reach and tendency, in their correspondencies one unto

Digitized by Google

another, and suitableness unto his own glory; and so alone judgeth aright of all things. The wisest of men, as David speaks, walk in a shade We see little, we know little; and that but of a very few things, and in an imperfect manner; and that of their present appearances, abstracted from their issues, successes, ends, and relations unto other things. And if we would be farther wise in the works of God, we shall be found to be like the wild ass's colt. What is good for us or the church of God, what is evil to it or us, we know not at all; but all things are open and naked unto God. The day will come, indeed, wherein we shall have such a prospect of the works of God, see one thing so set against another, as to find goodness, beauty, and order in them all,—that they were all done in number, weight, and measure,—that nothing could have been otherwise without an abridgment of his glory and disadvantage of them that believe in him; but for the present, all our wisdom consists in referring all unto him. He who doth these things is infinitely wise; he knows what he doth, and why, and what will be the end of all. We are apt, it may be, to think that at such seasons all things will go to wreck with ourselves, with the church, or with the whole world: "How can this breach be repaired, this loss made up, this ruin recovered? peace is gone, trade is gone, our substance is gone, the church is gone,—all is gone; confusion and utter desolation lie at the door." But if a man who is unskilled and unexperienced should be at sea, it may be, every time the vessel wherein he is seems to decline on either side, he would be apt to conceive they should be all cast away; but yet, if he be not childishly timorous, when the master shall tell him that there is no danger, bid him trust to his skill and it shall be well with him, it will yield quietness and satisfaction. We are indeed in a storm,—the whole earth seems to reel and stagger like a drunken man; but yet our souls may rest in the infinite skill and wisdom of *the great Pilot of the whole creation*, who steers all things according to the counsel of his will. "His works are manifold: in wisdom hath he made them all," Ps. civ. 24. And in the same wisdom doth he dispose of them: "All these things come forth from the LORD of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working," Isa. xxviii. 29. What is good, meet, useful for us, for ours, for the churches, for the city, for the land of our nativity, he knows, and of creatures not one. This infinite wisdom of God, also, are we therefore to resign and submit ourselves unto. His hand in all his works is guided by infinite wisdom. In thoughts thereof, in humbling ourselves thereunto, shall we find rest and peace; and this in all our pressures will work us to a waiting for him.

3. *The righteousness of God* is also to be considered in this matter. That name in the Scripture is used to denote many excellencies of

Digitized by Google

God, all which are reducible unto the infinite rectitude of his nature. I intend that at present which is called "justitia regiminis," his righteousness in rule or government. This is remembered by Abraham: Gen. xviii. 25, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And by the apostle: "Is God unjust who taketh vengeance? God forbid." This our souls are to own in all the works of God. They are all righteous,—all his who "will do no iniquity, whose throne is established in judgment." However they may be dreadful, grievous, and seem severe, yet they are all righteous. It is true he will sometimes "rise up and do strange works, strange acts," Isa. xxviii. 21, such as he will not do often nor ordinarily, such as shall fill the world with dread and amazement,—he will "answer his people in terrible things!" but yet all shall be in righteousness. And to complain of that which is righteous, to repine against it, is the highest unrighteousness that may be. Faith, then, fixing the soul on the righteousness of God, is an effectual means to humble it under his mighty hand. And to help us herein, we may consider,—

(1.) That "God *judgeth not as man judgeth.*" We judge by the "seeing of the eye, and hearing of the ear,"—according to outward appearances and evidences; "but God searcheth the heart." We judge upon what is between man and man; God principally upon what is between himself and man. And what do we know or understand of these things? or what there is in the heart of man, what purposes, what contrivances, what designs, what corrupt affections, what sins; what transactions have been between God and them; what warnings he hath given them; what reproofs, what engagements they have made; what convictions they have had; what use they were putting their lives, their substance, their families unto? Alas! we know nothing of these things, and so are able to make no judgment of the proceedings of God upon them; but this we know, that he "is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works," yea, the most terrible of them. And when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, ah! how glorious will be his drowning of the old world, firing of Sodom, swallowing up of Dathan and Abiram in the earth, the utter rejection of the Jews, with all other acts of his providence seeming to be accompanied with severity! And so will our own trials, inward or outward, appear to be.

(2.) God is *judge of all the world*, of all ages, times, places, persons; and disposeth of all so as they may tend unto *the good of the whole* and his own glory in the universe. Our thoughts are bounded, much more our observations and abilities, to measure things within a very small compass. Every thing stands alone unto us, whereby we see little of its beauty or order, nor do know how it ought justly to be disposed of. That particular may seem deformed unto us,

Digitized by Google

which, when it is under His eye who sees all at once, past, present, and to come, with all those joints and bands of wisdom and order whereby things are related unto one another, is beautiful and glorious: for as nothing is *of itself*, nor *by itself*, nor *to itself*, so nothing stands alone; but there is a line of mutual respect that runs through the creation and every particular of it, and that in all its changes and alterations from the beginning to the end, which gives it its loveliness, life, and order. He that can at once see but one part of a goodly statue or colossus might think it a very deformed piece, when he that views it altogether is assured of its due proportion, symmetry, and loveliness. Now, all things, ages, and persons, all thus at once are objected unto the sight of God; and he disposeth them with respect unto the whole, that every one may fill up its own place, and sustain its part and share in the common tendency of all to the same end.

And hence it is that in public judgments and calamities, God oftentimes suffers the godly to be involved with the wicked, and that not on the account of their *own persons*, but as they are *parts of that body* which he will destroy. This Job expresseth somewhat harshly, but there is truth in his assertion: chap. ix. 22, 23, "This is one thing, therefore I said it, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked. If the scourge slay suddenly, he will laugh at the trial of the innocent." God in public desolations oftentimes takes good and bad together; a sudden scourge involves them all. And this God doth for sundry reasons; as,—

[1.] That he may manifest *his own holiness;* which is such that he can, without the least injustice or oppression, even upon the account of their own provocations, take away the houses, possessions, estates, liberties, and lives of the best of his own saints: for how should a man, any man, the best of men, be just with God, if he would contend with him? No man can answer to him "one of a thousand," Job ix. 3:—This they will also own and acknowledge; upon the account of righteousness none can open his mouth about his judgments, without the highest impiety and wickedness.

[2.] He doth so that his *own people may learn to know his terror*, and to rejoice always before him with trembling. Therefore Job affirms, that "in the time of his prosperity he was not secure," but still trembled in himself with thoughts of the judgments of God. Doubtless much wretched carnal security would be ready to invade and possess the hearts of believers, if God should always and constantly pass them by in the dispensations of his public judgments.

[3.] That it may be a *stone of offence and a stumbling-block unto wicked men*, who are to be hardened in their sins and prepared for ruin. When they see that all things fall alike unto all, and that

Digitized by Google

those who have made the strictest profession of the name and fear of God fare no better than themselves, they are encouraged to despise the warnings of God and the strokes of his hand, and so to rush on unto the destruction whereunto they are prepared.

[4.] God doth it to proclaim unto all the world that *what he doth here is no final judgment* and ultimate determination concerning things and persons; for who can see the "wise man dying as a fool," the righteous and holy perishing in their outward concernments as the ungodly and wicked, but must conclude that the righteous God, the judge of all, hath appointed another day, wherein all things must be called over again, and every one then receive his final reward, according as his works shall appear to have been? And thus are we to humble ourselves unto the righteousness wherewith the hand of God is always accompanied.

[5.] *His goodness and grace* is also to be considered in all the works of his mighty hands. As there is no unrighteousness in him, so also [there is] all that is good and gracious. And whatever there is in any trouble of allay from the utmost wrath, is of mere goodness and grace. Thy houses are burned, but perhaps thy goods are saved,—is there no grace, no goodness therein? Or perhaps thy substance also is consumed, but yet thy person is alive; and should a living man complain? But say what thou wilt, this stroke is not hell, which thou hast deserved long ago, yea, it may be a means of preventing thy going thither; so that it is accompanied with infinite goodness, patience, and mercy also. And if the considerations hereof will not quiet thy heart, take heed lest a worse thing befall thee.

And these things amongst others are we to consider in God, to lead our hearts into an acquiescing in his will, a submission under his mighty hand, and a patient waiting for the issue.

Secondly, [As to ourselves, what we are, and what we have deserved]:—

1. Consider our *mean and abject condition*, and that infinite distance wherein we stand from him with whom we have to do. When Abraham, the father of the faithful and friend of God, came to treat with him about his judgments, he doth it with this acknowledgment of his condition, that he was "mere dust and ashes," Gen. xviii. 27,—a poor abject creature, that God at his pleasure had formed out of the dust of the earth, and which in a few days was to be reduced again into the ashes of it. We can forget nothing more perniciously than what we are. "Man is a worm," saith Bildad, "and the son of man is but a worm," Job xxv. 6. "And therefore," says Job himself, "I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister," chap. xvii. 14. His affinity, his relation unto them, is the nearest imaginable, and he is no other-

Digitized by Google

wise to be accounted of; and there is nothing that God abhors more than an elation of mind in the forgetfulness of our mean, frail condition. "Thou sayest," said he to the proud prince of Tyrus, "that thou art a god; but," saith he, "wilt thou yet say before him that slayeth thee, I am God?" Ezek. xxviii. 2, 9. That severe conviction did God provide for his pride, "Thou shalt be a man, and no god, in the hand of him that slayeth thee." And when Herod prided himself in the acclamations of the vain multitude, ("The voice of a god, and not of a man!") the angel of the Lord filled that god immediately with worms, which slew him and devoured him, Acts xii. 23. There is, indeed, nothing more effectual to abase the pride of the thoughts of men than a due remembrance that they are so. Hence the psalmist prays, Ps. ix. 20, "Put them in fear, O LORD; that the nations may know themselves to be but men;" so, and no more: אֱנוֹשׁ חֻמָּה, "poor, miserable, frail, mortal man," as the word signifies. "What is man? what is his life? what is his strength?" said one; "The dream of a shadow; a mere nothing." Or as David, much better, "Every man living, in his best condition, is altogether vanity," Ps. xxxix. 5. And James, "Our life," which is our best, our all, "is but a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away," chap. iv. 14. But enough hath been spoken by many on this subject. And we that have seen so many thousands each week, in one city, carried away to the grave, have been taught the truth of our frailty, even as with thorns and briers. But I know not how it comes to pass, there is not any thing we are more apt to forget than what we ourselves are; and this puts men on innumerable miscarriages towards God and one another. Thou, therefore, that art exercised under the hand of God in any severe dispensation, and art ready on all occasions to fill thy mouth with complaints, sit down a little and take a right measure of thyself, and see whether this frame and posture becomes thee. It is the great God against whom thou repinest, and thou art a man, and that is a name of a worm, a poor, frail, dying worm; and it may be whilst thou art speaking, thou art no more. And wilt thou think it meet for such a one as thou art to magnify thyself against the great possessor of heaven and earth? Poor clay, poor dust and ashes, poor dying worm! know thy state and condition, and fall down quietly under the mighty hand of God. Though thou wranglest with men about thy concernments, let God alone. "The potsherds may contend with the potsherds of the earth, but woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!"

2. Consider that in this frail condition *we have all greatly sinned against God.* So did Job, chap. vii. 20, "I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou Preserver of men?" If this consideration will not satisfy thy mind, yet it will assuredly stop the mouths

Digitized by Google

of all the sons of men. Though all the curses of the law should be executed upon us, yet "every mouth must be stopped;" because "all the world is become guilty before God," Rom. iii. 19. "Wherefore doth a living man complain?" saith the prophet, Lam. iii. 39. Why, it may be, it is because that his trouble is great and inexpressible, and such as seldom or never befell any before him. But what then? Saith he, "Shall a man complain for the punishment of his sins?" If this living man be a sinful man, as there is none that liveth and sinneth not, whatever his state and condition be, he hath no ground of murmuring or complaint. For a sinful man to complain, especially whilst he is yet a living man, is most unreasonable; for,—

(1.) Whatever hath befallen us, it *is just on the account that we are sinners before God;* and to repine against the judgments of God, that are rendered evidently righteous upon the account of sin, is to anticipate the condition of the damned in hell, a great part of whose misery it is that they always repine against that sentence and punishment which they know to be most righteous and holy. If this were now a place, if that were now my design, to treat of the sins of all professors, how easy were it to stop the mouths of all men about their troubles! But that is not my present business. I speak unto particular persons, and that not with an especial design to convince them of their sins, but to humble their souls. Another season may be taken to press that consideration, directly and professedly also. At present let us only, when our souls are ready to be entangled with the thoughts of any severe dispensation of God, and our own particular pressures, troubles, miseries, occasioned thereby, turn into ourselves, and take a view every one of his own personal provocations; and when we have done so, see what we have to say to God, what we have to complain of. Let the man hold his tongue, and let the sinner speak. Is not God holy, righteous, wise, in what he hath done? and if he be, why do we not subscribe unto his ways, and submit quietly unto his will?

(2.) But this is not all. We are not only *such sinners* as to render these dispensations of God *evidently holy*, these judgments of his righteous; but also to manifest that they are accompanied *with unspeakable patience*, mercy, and grace. To instance in one particular:—Is it the burning of our houses, the spoiling of our goods, the ruin of our estates alone, that our sins have deserved? If God had made the temporary fire on earth to have been unto us a way of entrance into the eternal fire of hell, we had not had whereof righteously to complain. May we not, then, see a mixture of unspeakable patience, grace, and mercy, in every dispensation? and shall we, then, repine against it? Is it not better advice, "Go, and sin no

Digitized by Google

more, lest a worse thing befall thee?" For a sinner out of hell not to rest in the will of God, not to humble himself under his mighty hand, is to make himself guilty of the especial sin of hell. Other sins deserve it, but repining against God is principally, yea, only committed in it. The church comes to a blessed quieting resolution in this case, Micah vii. 9, "I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him;" bear it quietly, patiently, and submit under his hand therein.

3. Consider that of ourselves *we are not able to make a right judgment of what is good for us*, what evil unto us, or what tends most directly unto our chiefest end. Ps. xxxix. 6, "Surely man walketh in a vain shew,"—בְּצֶלֶם, in an image full of false representations of things, in the midst of vain appearances, so that he knows not what to choose or do aright; and therefore spends the most of his time and strength about things that are of no use or purpose unto him: "Surely they are disquieted in vain." And hereof he gives one especial instance: "He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather;" which is but one example of the manifold frustrations that men meet withal in the whole course of their lives, as not knowing what is good for them. We all profess to aim at one chief and principal end,—namely, the enjoyment of God in Christ as our eternal reward; and in order thereunto, to be carried on in the use of the means of faith and obedience, tending to that end. Now, if this be so, the suitableness or unsuitableness of all other things, being good or evil unto us, is to be measured by their tendency unto this end. And what know we hereof? As unto the things of this life, do we know whether it will be best for us to be rich or poor, to have houses or to be harbourless, to abound or to want, to leave wealth and inheritances unto our children, or to leave them naked unto the providence of God? Do we know what state, what condition will most further our obedience, best obviate our temptations, or call most on us to mortify our corruptions? And if we know nothing at all of these things, as indeed we do not, were it not best for us to leave them quietly unto God's disposal? I doubt not but it will appear at the last day that a world of evil in the hearts of men was stifled by the destruction of their outward concernments, more by their inward troubles; that many were delivered from temptations by it, who otherwise would have been overtaken, to their ruin, and the scandal of the gospel; that many a secret imposthume hath been lanced and cured by a stroke: for God doth not send judgments on his own for judgments' sake, for punishment's sake, but always to accomplish some blessed design of grace towards them. And there is no one soul in particular which shall rightly search itself, and consider its state and condition, but will be able to see wisdom, grace, and care towards

Digitized by Google

itself in all the dispensations of God. And if I would here enter upon the benefits that, through the sanctifying hand of God, do redound unto believers by afflictions, calamities, troubles, distresses, temptations, and the like effects of God's visitations, it would be of use unto the souls of men in this case. But this subject hath been so often and so well spoken unto that I shall not insist upon it. I desire only that we would seriously consider how utterly ignorant we are of what is good for us or useful unto us in these outward things, and so leave them quietly unto God's disposal.

4. We may consider that *all these things about which we are troubled fall directly within the compass of that good word of God's grace*, that he will make "all things work together for the good of them that love him," Rom. viii. 28. All things that we enjoy, all things that we are deprived of, all that we do, all that we suffer, our losses, troubles, miseries, distresses, in which the apostle instanceth in the following verses, they shall all "work together for good,"—together with one another, and all with and in subordination unto the power, grace, and wisdom of God. It may be, we see not how or by what means it may be effected; but he is infinitely wise and powerful who hath undertaken it, and we know little or nothing of his ways. There is nothing that we have, or enjoy, or desire, but it hath turned unto some unto their hurt. Riches have been kept for men unto their hurt. Wisdom and high places have been the ruin of many. Liberty and plenty are to most a snare. Prosperity slays the foolish. And we are not of ourselves in any measure able to secure ourselves from the hurt and poison that is in any of these things, but that they may be our ruin also, as they have already been, and every day are, unto multitudes of the children of men. It is enough to fill the soul of any man with horror and amazement, to consider the ways and ends of most of them that are intrusted with this world's goods. Is it not evident that all their lives they seem industriously to take care that they may perish eternally? Luxury, riot, oppression, intemperance, and of late especially, blasphemy and atheism, they usually give up themselves unto. And this is the fruit of their abundance and security. What, now, if God should deprive us of all these things? Can any one certainly say that he is worsted thereby? Might they not have turned unto his everlasting perdition, as well as they do so of thousands as good by nature, and who have had advantages to be as wise as we? And shall we complain of God's dispensations about them? And what shall we say when he himself hath undertaken to make all things that he guides us unto to work together for our good? Anxieties of mind and perplexities of heart about our losses is not that which we are called unto in our troubles. But this is that which is our duty,—let us consider whether we "love

Digitized by Google

God" or no, whether "we are called according to his purpose." If so, all things are well in his hand, who can order them for our good and advantage. I hope many a poor soul will from hence, under all their trouble, be able to say, with him that was banished from his country, and found better entertainment elsewhere, "My friends, I had perished, if I had not perished;—had I not been undone by fire, it may be I had been ruined in eternal fire. God hath made all to work for my good."

The end of all these discourses is, to evince the reasonableness of the duty of waiting on God, which we are pressing from the psalmist. Ignorance of God and ourselves is the great principle and cause of all our disquietments; and this ariseth mostly, not from want of light and instruction, but for want of consideration and application. The notions insisted on concerning God are obvious and known unto all; so are these concerning ourselves: but by whom almost are they employed and improved as they ought? The frame of our spirits is as though we stood upon equal terms with God, and did think, with Jonah, that we might do well to be angry with what he doth. Did we rightly consider him, did we stand in awe of him as we ought, it had certainly been otherwise with us.

Influence of the promises into the soul's waiting in time of trouble—The nature of them.

HAVING, therefore, laid down these considerations from the second observation taken from the words,—namely, that Jehovah himself is the proper object of the soul's waiting in the condition described,—I shall only add one direction, how we may be enabled to perform and discharge this duty aright, which we have manifested to have been so necessary, so reasonable, so prevalent for the obtaining of relief; and this ariseth from another of the propositions laid down for the opening of these verses, not as yet spoken unto,—namely, that *the word of promise is the soul's great supportment in waiting for God.*

So saith the psalmist, "In his word do I hope;" that is, the word of promise. As the word in general is the adequate rule of all our obedience unto God and communion with him, so there are especial parts of it that are suited unto these especial actings of our souls towards him. Thus the word of promise, or the promise in the word, is that which our faith especially regards in our hope, trust, and waiting on God; and it is suited to answer unto the immediate actings of our souls therein. From this word of promise, therefore, that

Digitized by Google

is, from these promises, doth the soul in its distress take encouragement to continue waiting on God; and that on these two accounts:—

First, Because they are *declarative* of God, his mind and his will; and, secondly, Because they are *communicative of grace* and strength to the soul;—of which latter we shall not here treat.

First, The *end* and use of the promise is, to declare, reveal, and make known God unto believers; and that, in an especial manner, in him and concerning him which may give them encouragement to wait for him:—

1. The promises are *a declaration of the nature of God*, especially of his goodness, grace, and love. God hath put an impression of all the glorious excellencies of his nature on his word, especially, as he is in Christ, on the word of the gospel. There, as in a glass, do we behold his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. As his commands express unto us his holiness, his threatenings, his righteousness, and severity; so do his promises, his goodness, grace, love, and bounty. And in these things do we learn all that we truly and solidly know of God; that is, we know him in and by his word. The soul, therefore, that in this condition is waiting on or for God, considers the representation which he makes of himself and of his own nature in and by the promises, and receives supportment and encouragement in his duty; for if God teach us by the promises what he is, and what he will be unto us, we have firm ground to expect from him all fruits of benignity, kindness, and love. Let the soul frame in itself that idea of God which is exhibited in the promises, and it will powerfully prevail with it to continue in an expectation of his gracious returns; they all expressing goodness, love, patience, forbearance, long-suffering, pardoning mercy, grace, bounty, with a full satisfactory reward. This is the beauty of the Lord mentioned with admiration by the prophet, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!" Zech. ix. 17; which is the great attractive of the soul to adhere constantly unto him. Whatever difficulties arise, whatever temptations interpose, or wearisomeness grows upon us, in our straits, troubles, trials, and desertions, let us not entertain such thoughts of God as our own perplexed imaginations may be apt to suggest unto us. This would quickly cast us into a thousand impatiences, misgivings, and miscarriages. But the remembrance of and meditation on God in his promises, as revealed by them, as expressed in them, is suited quite unto other ends and purposes. There appear, yea, gloriously shine forth, that love, that wisdom, that goodness, tenderness, and grace, as cannot but encourage a believing soul to abide in waiting for him.

2. The word of promise doth not only *express God's nature* as

Digitized by Google

that wherein he proposeth himself unto the contemplation of faith, but it also *declares his will and purpose* of acting towards the soul suitably unto his own goodness and grace: for promises are the declarations of God's purpose and will to act towards believers in Christ Jesus according to the infinite goodness of his own nature; and this is done in great variety, according to the various conditions and wants of them that do believe. They all proceed from the same spring of infinite grace, but are branched into innumerable particular streams, according as our necessities do require. To these do waiting souls repair, for stay and encouragement. Their perplexities principally arise from their misapprehensions of what God is in himself, and of what he will be unto them; and whither should they repair to be undeceived but unto that faithful representation that he hath made of himself and his will in the word of his grace? for "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him," John i. 18. Now, the *gospel is nothing but the word of promise explained, in all the springs, causes, and effects of it.* Thither must we repair, to be instructed in this matter. The imaginations and reasonings of men's hearts will but deceive them in these things. The informations or instructions of other men may do so; nor have they any truth in them farther than they may be resolved into the word of promise. Here alone they may find rest and refreshment. The soul of whom we speak is under troubles, perplexities, and distresses as to its outward condition,—pressed with many straits, it may be, on every hand; and as to its spiritual estate, under various apprehensions of the mind and will of God towards it; as hath before at large been explained. In this condition it is brought, in some measure, unto a holy submission unto God, and a patient waiting for the issue of its trials. In this estate it hath many temptations to, and much working of, unbelief. The whole of its opposition amounts to this, that it is neglected of God,—that its way is hid, and his judgment is passed over from him,—that it shall not be at present delivered, nor hereafter saved. What course can any one advise such a one unto for his relief, and to preserve his soul from fainting or deserting the duty of waiting on God wherein he is engaged, but only this, to search and inquire what revelation God hath made of himself and his will concerning him in his word? And this the promise declares. Here he shall find hope, patience, faith, expectation, to be all increased, comforted, encouraged. Herein lies the duty and safety of any in this condition. Men may bear the first impression of any trouble with the strength, courage, and resolution of their natural spirits. Under some continuance of them they may support themselves with former experiences, and other usual springs and means of consolation. But

Digitized by Google

if their wounds prove difficult to be cured, if they despise ordinary remedies, if their diseases are of long continuance, this is that which they must betake themselves unto:—They must search into the word of promise, and learn to measure things, not according to the present state and apprehensions of their mind, but according unto what God hath declared concerning them. And there are sundry excellencies in the promises, when hoped in or trusted in, that tend unto the establishment of the soul in this great duty of waiting; as,—

(1.) That *grace* in them,—that is, the good-will of God in Christ for help, relief, satisfaction, pardon, and salvation,—*is suited unto all particular conditions and wants of the soul.* As light ariseth from the sun, and is diffused in the beams thereof to the especial use of all creatures enabled by a visive faculty to make use of it; so cometh grace forth from the eternal good-will of God in Christ, and is diffused by the promises, with a blessed contemporation unto the conditions and wants of all believers. There can nothing fall out between God and any soul but there is grace suited unto it, in one promise or another, as clearly and evidently as if it were given unto him particularly and immediately. And this they find by experience who at any time are enabled to mix effectually a promise with faith.

(2.) The *word of promise hath a wonderful, mysterious, especial impression of God upon it.* He doth by it secretly and ineffably communicate himself unto believers. When God appeared in a dream unto Jacob, he awaked and said, "God is in this place, and I knew it not." He knew God was everywhere, but an intimation of his especial presence surprised him. So is a soul surprised, when God opens himself and his grace in a promise unto him. It cries out, "God is here, and I knew it not." Such a near approach of God in his grace it finds, as is accompanied with a refreshing surprisal.

(3.) There is an especial *engagement of the veracity and truth of God in every promise.* Grace and truth are the two ingredients of an evangelical promise,—the matter and form whereof they do consist. I cannot now stay to show wherein this especial engagement of truth in the promise doth consist; besides, it is a thing known and confessed. But it hath an especial influence to support the soul, when hoped in, in its duty of waiting; for that hope can never make ashamed or leave the soul unto disappointments which stays itself on divine veracity under a special engagement.

And this is that duty which the psalmist engageth himself in and unto the performance of, as the only way to obtain a comfortable interest in that forgiveness which is with God, and all the gracious effects thereof. And in the handling hereof, as we have declared its nature and necessity, so we have the psalmist's directions for its prac-

Digitized by Google

tice, unto persons in the like condition with him, for the attaining of the end by him aimed at; so that it needs no farther application. That which remains of the psalm is the address which he makes unto others, with the encouragement which he gives them to steer the same course with himself; and this he doth in the two last verses, which, to complete the exposition of the whole psalm, I shall briefly explain and pass through, as having already despatched what I principally aimed at.

VERSES SEVENTH AND EIGHTH.

"Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

I SHALL proceed, in the opening of these words, according unto the method already insisted on. First, the *meaning of the principal words* shall be declared; then, the sense and importance of the whole; thirdly, the *relation* that they have unto the condition of the soul expressed in the psalm must be manifested;—from all which observations will arise for our instruction and direction in the like cases, wherein we are or may be concerned.

FIRST. Verse 7. "Let Israel hope in the LORD:" יַחֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יְהוָה, "Hope, Israel, in Jehovah,"—"trust," or "expect;" the same word with that, verse 5, "In his word do I hope;" properly, to expect, to look for, which includes hope, and adds some farther degree of the soul's acting towards God. It is an earnest looking after the thing hoped for: "Expecta ad Dominum,"—hope in him, and look up to him.

"For with the LORD,"—"quia," or "quoniam," because seeing that with the Lord,—הַחֶסֶד, "mercy." The verb substantive, as usual, is omitted, which we supply, "There is mercy,"—grace, bounty, goodness, good-will. This word is often joined with another, discovering its importance; and that is אֱמֶת, "truth:" חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת, "goodness," or "mercy and truth." These are, as it were, constituent parts of God's promises. It is of goodness, grace, bounty, to promise any undue mercy; and it is of truth or faithfulness to make good what is so promised. The LXX. commonly render this word by ἔλεος,—that is, "pardoning mercy," as it is everywhere used in the New Testament.

"And with him is plenteous redemption:" עִמּוֹ, "with him," as before, speaking unto God, verse 4, עִמָּךְ, "with thee there is;" the meaning of which expression hath been opened at large. "Redemp-

Digitized by Google

tion:" פְּדוּת, from פָּדָה, "to redeem;" the same with פְּדְיוֹן, λύτρωσις, ἀπολύτρωσις, "redemption." This word is often used for a proper redemption, such as is made by the intervention of a price, and not a mere assertion unto liberty by power, which is sometimes also called redemption. Thus it is said of the money that the first-born of the children of Israel, which were above the number of the Levites, were redeemed with, that Moses took הַפְּדוּיִם, the "redemption;" that is, the redemption-money, the price of their redemption, Numb. iii. 49, Ps. xlix. 8. The redemption of men's souls is precious; it cost a great price. The redemption, then, that is with God relates unto a price. Goodness or mercy, with respect unto a price, becomes redemption; that is, actively the cause or means of it. What that price is, see Matt. xx. 28; 1 Pet. i. 18.

"Plenteous redemption:" הַרְבֵּה, "Multa, copiosa,"—much, abundant, plenteous. It is used both for quantity and quality: much in quantity, or plenteous, abundant; and in quality,—that is, precious, excellent. And it is applied in a good and bad sense. So it is said of our sins, Ezra. ix. 6, "Our sins," רָבּוּ, "are increased" or "multiplied," or are "great;" many in number, and heinous in their nature or quality. And in the other sense it is applied unto the mercy of God, whereby they are removed; it is great or plenteous, it is excellent or precious.

Verse 8. "And he,"—that is, the Lord Jehovah, he with whom is plenteous redemption,—יִפְדֶּה, "shall redeem," or make them partakers of that redemption that is with him. "He shall redeem Israel,"—that is, those who hope and trust in him.

"From all his iniquities:" מִכֹּל עֲוֹנֹתָיו, "His iniquities;" that is, of the elect of Israel, and every individual amongst them. But the word signifies trouble as well as sin, especially that trouble or punishment that is for sin. So Cain expresseth himself upon the denunciation of his sentence: גָּדוֹל עֲוֹנִי מִנְּשׂוֹא, "My sin,"—that is, the punishment thou hast denounced against my sin,—"is too great or heavy for me to bear," Gen. iv. 13. There is a near affinity between sin and trouble: "Noxam pœna sequitur;"—"Punishment is inseparable from iniquity." עָוֹן, then, the word here used, signifies either sin with reference unto trouble due to it, or trouble with respect unto sin, whence it proceeds; and both may here be well intended: "God shall redeem Israel from all his sins, and troubles that have ensued thereon." And this is the signification of the words; which, indeed, are plain and obvious.

And these words close up the psalm. He who began with depths,—his own depths of sin and trouble,—out of which and about which he cried out unto God, is so encouraged by that prospect of grace and forgiveness with God, which by faith he had obtained, as to

Digitized by Google

preach unto others, and to support them in expectation of deliverance from all their sin and trouble also.

And such, for the most part, are all the exercises and trials of the children of God. Their entrance may be a *storm*, but their close is a *calm;* their beginning is oftentimes trouble, but their latter end is peace,—peace to themselves, and advantage to the church of God: for men in all ages coming out of great trials of their own have been the most instrumental for the good of others, for God doth not greatly exercise any of his but with some especial end for his own glory.

SECONDLY, The sense and intendment of the psalmist in these words is to be considered; and that resolves itself into three general parts:—

1. An *exhortation* or admonition: "Israel, hope in the LORD," or "expect Jehovah."

2. A *ground of encouragement* unto the performance of the duty exhorted unto: "Because with the LORD there is much, plenteous, abundant, precious redemption."

3. A *gracious promise* of a blessed issue, which shall be given unto the performance of this duty: "He shall redeem Israel from all his sins, and out of all his troubles."

1. In the exhortation there occur,—

(1.) *The persons exhorted,*—that is, Israel: not Israel according to the flesh, for "they are not all Israel which are of Israel," Rom. ix. 6; but it is the Israel mentioned, Ps. lxxiii. 1, the whole Israel of God, to whom he is good, "such as are of a clean heart,"—that is, all those who are interested in the covenant, and do inherit the promise of their forefather who was first called by that name, all believers. And the psalmist treats them all in general in this matter,—

[1.] Because there is none of them but have their *trials and entanglements about sin*, more or less. As there is "none that liveth and sinneth not," so there is none that sinneth and is not entangled and troubled. Perhaps, then, they are not all of them in the same condition with him, in the depths that he was plunged into. Yet more or less, all and every one of them is so far concerned in sin as to need his direction. All the saints of God either have been, or are, or may be, in these depths. It is a good saying of Austin on this place, "Valde sunt in profundo qui non clamant de profundo;" —"None so in the deep as they who do not cry and call out of the deep." They are in a deep of security who are never sensible of a deep of sin.

[2.] There is none of them, whatever their present condition be, but *they may fall into the like depths* with those of the psalmist. There is nothing absolutely in the covenant, nor in any promise, to

Digitized by Google

secure them from it. And what befalleth any one believer may befall them all. If any one believer may fall totally away, all may do so, and not leave one in the world, and so an end be put to the kingdom of Christ; which is no small evidence that they cannot so fall. But they may fall into depths of sin. That some of them have done so we have testimonies and instances beyond exception. It is good, then, that all of them should be prepared for that duty which they may all stand in need of, and for a right discharge of it. Besides, the duty mentioned is not absolutely restrained to the condition before described, but it is proper and accommodate unto other seasons also. Therefore are all the Israel of God exhorted unto it.

(2.) The *duty itself is, hoping in Jehovah,* with such a hope or trust as hath an expectation of relief joined with it. And there are two things included in this duty:—

[1.] The *renunciation* of any hopes, in expectation of deliverance either from sin or trouble any other way: "Hope in Jehovah." This is frequently expressed where the performance of this duty is mentioned. See Hos. xiv. 3; Jer. iii. 22, 23. And we have declared the nature of it in the exposition of the first and second verses.

[2.] *Expectation* from him; and this also hath been insisted on, in the observations from the verses immediately preceding; wherein also the whole nature of this duty was explained, and directions were given for the due performance of it.

2. The *encouragement tendered* unto this duty is the next thing in the words: "For with the LORD is plenteous redemption;" wherein we may observe,—

(1.) *What it is* that he professeth as the great encouragement unto the duty mentioned; and that is *redemption,*—the redemption that is with God: upon the matter, the same with the forgiveness before mentioned, mercy, pardon, benignity, bounty. He doth not bid them hope in the Lord because they were the seed of Abraham, the peculiar people of God, made partakers of privileges above all the people in the world; much less because of their worthiness, or that good that was in themselves; but merely upon the account of mercy in God, of his grace, goodness, and bounty. The mercy of God, and the redemption that is with him, is the only ground unto sinners for hope and confidence in him.

(2.) There are two great *concernments of this grace,*—the one expressed, the other implied in the words. The *first* is, that it is much, plenteous, abundant. That which principally discourageth distressed souls from a comfortable waiting on God is, their fears lest they should not obtain mercy from him, and that because their sins are so great and so many, or attended with such circumstances and aggra-

Digitized by Google

vations, as that it is impossible they should find acceptance with God. This ground of despondency and unbelief the psalmist obviates by representing the fulness, the plenty, the boundless plenty, of the mercy that is with God. It is such as will suit the condition of the greatest sinners in their greatest depths; the stores of its treasures are inexhaustible. And the force of the exhortation doth not lie so much in this, that there is redemption with God, as that this redemption is plenteous or abundant. *Secondly*, Here is an intimation in the word itself of that relation which the goodness and grace of God proposed hath to the blood of Christ, whence it is called "Redemption." This, as was showed in the opening of the words, hath respect unto a price, the price whereby we are bought; that is, the blood of Christ. This is that whereby way is made for the exercise of mercy towards sinners. Redemption, which properly denotes actual deliverance, is said to be with God, or in him, as the effect in the cause. The causes of it are, his own grace and the blood of Christ. There are these prepared for the redeeming of believers from sin and trouble unto his own glory. And herein lieth the encouragement that the psalmist proposeth unto the performance of the duty exhorted unto,—namely, to wait on God,—it is taken from God himself, as all encouragements unto sinners to draw nigh unto him and to wait for him must be. Nothing but himself can give us confidence to go unto him; and it is suited unto the state and condition of the soul under consideration. Redemption and mercy are suited to give relief from sin and misery.

3. The last verse contains a *promise of the issue* of the performance of this duty: "He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." Two things are observable in the words:—

(1.) The *certainty of the issue* or event of the duty mentioned: וְהוּא יִפְדֶּה, "And he shall," or "he will redeem;" he will assuredly do so. Now, although this in the psalmist is given out by revelation, and is a new promise of God, yet, as it relates to the condition of the soul here expressed, and the discovery made by faith of forgiveness and redemption with God, the certainty intended in this assertion is built upon the principles before laid down. Whence, therefore, doth it appear, whence may we infallibly conclude, that God will redeem his Israel from all their iniquities? I answer,—

[1.] The conclusion is drawn from *the nature of God*. There is forgiveness and redemption with him, and he will act towards his people suitably to his own nature. There is redemption with him, and therefore he will redeem; forgiveness with him, and therefore he will forgive. As the conclusion is certain and infallible, that wicked men, ungodly men, shall be destroyed, because God is righteous and holy, his righteousness and holiness indispensably requiring

Digitized by Google

their destruction; so is the redemption and salvation of all that believe certain on this account,—namely, because there is forgiveness with him. He is good and gracious, and ready to forgive; his goodness and grace requires their salvation.

[2.] The conclusion is certain upon the account of *God's faithfulness in his promises.* He hath promised that those who wait on him "shall not be ashamed,"—that their expectation shall not be disappointed; whence the conclusion is certain that in his time and way they shall be redeemed.

(2.) There is the *extent of this deliverance* or redemption: "Shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities." It was showed, in the opening of the verse, that this word denotes either sin procuring trouble, or trouble procured by sin; and there is a respect unto both sin and its punishment. From both, from all of both kinds, God will redeem his Israel; not this or that evil, this or that sin, but from all evil, all sin. He will take all sins from their souls, and wipe all tears from their eyes. Now, God is said to do this on many accounts:—

[1.] On the account of the *great cause* of all actual deliverance and redemption,—the blood of Christ. He hath laid an assured foundation of the whole work; the price of redemption is paid, and they shall in due time enjoy the effects and fruits of it.

[2.] Of the *actual communication* of the effects of that redemption unto them. This is sure to all the elect of God, to his whole Israel. They shall all be made partakers of them. And this is the end of all the promises of God, and of the grace and mercy promised in them,—namely, that they should be means to exhibit and give out to believers that redemption which is purchased and prepared for them. And this is done two ways:—

1*st.* *Partially, initially,* and *gradually,* in this life. Here God gives in unto them the pardon of their sins, being freely justified by his grace; and, in his sanctification of them through his Spirit, gives them delivery from the power and dominion of sin. Many troubles also he delivers them from, and from all as far as they are penal, or have any mixture of the curse in them.

2*dly.* *Completely,*—namely, when he shall have freed them from sin and trouble, and from all the effects and consequents of them, by bringing them unto the enjoyment of himself in glory.

THIRDLY, The words being thus opened, we may briefly, in the next place, consider what they express concerning the state, condition, or actings of the soul, which are represented in this psalm.

Having himself attained unto the state before described, and being engaged resolvedly unto the performance of that duty which would assuredly bring him into a haven of full rest and peace, the psalmist applies himself unto the residue of the Israel of God, to give them

Digitized by Google

encouragement unto this duty with himself, from the experience that he had of a blessed success therein. As if he had said unto them, "Ye are now in afflictions and under troubles, and that upon the account of your sins and provocations,—a condition, I confess, sad and deplorable; but yet there is hope in Israel concerning these things. For consider how it hath been with me, and how the Lord hath dealt with me. I was in depths inexpressible, and saw for a while no way or means of delivery; but God hath been pleased graciously to reveal himself unto me, as a God pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin. And in the consolation and supportment which I have received thereby, I am waiting for a full participation of the fruits of his love. Let me therefore prevail with you, who are in the like condition, to steer the same course with me. Only let your expectations be fixed on mercy and sovereign grace, without any regard unto any privilege or worth in yourselves. Rest in the plenteous redemption, those stores of grace which are with Jehovah; and according to his faithfulness in his promises he will deliver you out of all perplexing troubles."

Having thus opened the words, I shall now only name the doctrinal observations that are tendered from them, and so put a close to these discourses; as,—

Obs. 1. The *Lord Jehovah is the only hope for sin-distressed souls:* "Hope in the LORD." This hath been sufficiently discovered and confirmed on sundry passages in the psalm.

Obs. 2. The *ground of all hope and expectation of relief in sinners is mere grace, mercy, and redemption:* "Hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy." All other grounds of hope are false and deceiving.

Obs. 3. *Inexhaustible stores of mercy and redemption are needful for the encouragement of sinners to rest and wait on God:* "With him is plenteous redemption." Such is your misery, so pressing are your fears and disconsolations, that nothing less than boundless grace can relieve or support you; there are, therefore, such treasures and stores in God as are suited hereunto. "With him is plenteous redemption."

Obs. 4. *The ground of all the dispensation of mercy, goodness, grace, and forgiveness, which is in God to sinners, is laid in the blood of Christ;* hence it is here called "Redemption." Unto this also we have spoken at large before.

Obs. 5. *All that wait on God on the account of mercy and grace shall have an undoubted issue of peace:* "He shall redeem Israel." "Let him," saith God, "lay hold on my arm, that he may have peace, and he shall have peace," Isa. xxvii. 5.

Obs. 6. *Mercy given to them that wait on God, shall, in the close*

Digitized by Google

and issue, be every way full and satisfying: "He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

And these propositions do arise from the words as absolutely considered, and in themselves. If we mind their relation unto the peculiar condition of the soul represented in this psalm, they will yet afford us the ensuing observations:—

Obs. 1. *They who out of depths have, by faith and waiting, obtained mercy, or are supported in waiting from a sense of believed mercy and forgiveness, are fitted, and only they are fitted, to preach and declare grace and mercy unto others.* This was the case with the psalmist. Upon his emerging out of his own depths and straits, he declares the mercy and redemption whereby he was delivered unto the whole Israel of God.

Obs. 2. *A saving participation of grace and forgiveness leaves a deep impression of its fulness and excellency on the soul of a sinner.* So was it here with the psalmist. Having himself obtained forgiveness, he knows no bounds or measure, as it were, in the extolling of it: "There is with God, mercy, redemption, plenteous redemption, redeeming from all iniquity; I have found it so, and so will every one do that shall believe it."

Now, these observations might all of them, especially the two last, receive a useful improvement; but whereas what I principally intended from this psalm hath been at large insisted on upon the first verses of it, I shall not here farther draw forth any meditations upon them, but content myself with the exposition that hath been given of the design of the psalmist and sense of his words in these last verses.

END OF VOL. VI.

EDINBURGH: PRINTED BY JOHNSTONE AND HUNTER.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

DATE DUE

MR 14 '81

JE 27 '83

JE 3'84

DEMCO 38-297

Digitized by Google

Memorial Library Circulation
26 APR 1993 10:38 PM MM18

Item 89 0180 8016 8

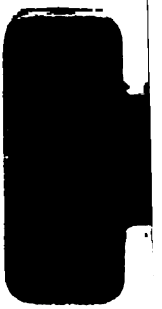
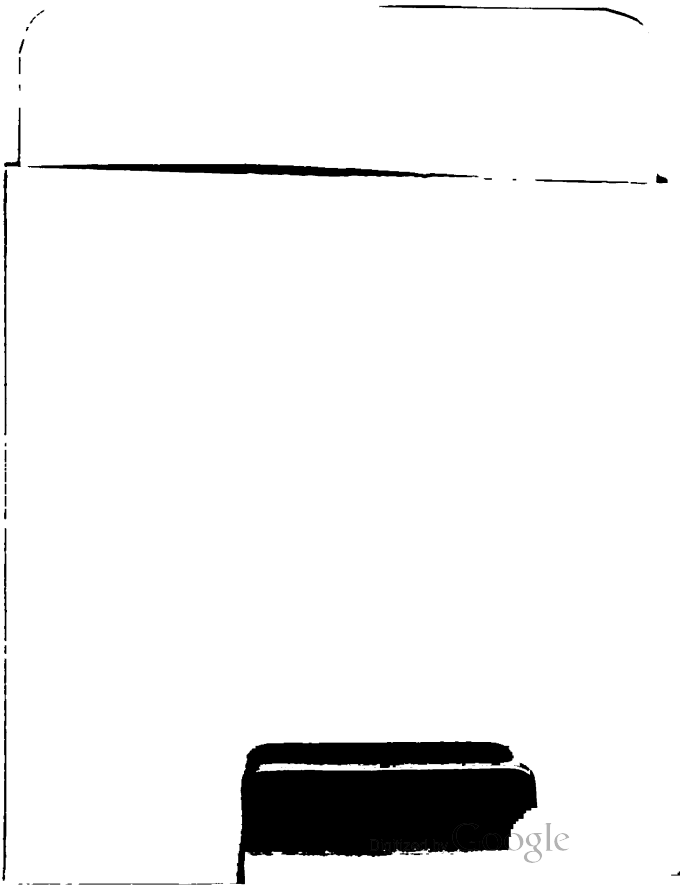
DEMCO

Digitized by Google

b89018080168
b89018080168a

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

b89018080168

b89018080168a

Digitized by Google